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GOLDEN GIRLS.

VOL. I.

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HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

GOLDEN GIRLS

BY

ALAN MUIR

AUTHOR OF

“LADY BEAUTY,” “CHILDREN’S CHILDREN,”
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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GOLDEN GIRLS.

INTRODUCTORY.

I.

A PROLOGUE SPOKEN BY MR. AUTHOR.

James Ben 12-May-1852 Christchurch 27
I HAVE to tell you the story of two girls who, in early childhood, were left without father or mother, and at the same time inheritors of a vast fortune. These children were placed under the guardianship of a distant relative, who had neither moral nor intellectual qualities to fit him for his important trust. The facts of their fortune were unhappily well known, and from the first day they were left orphans the two

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were made victims of various plots, each of which had the same end—the acquisition of the property of the children. These plots were scarcely the less dangerous to the young girls' peace because the method by which the schemers hoped to secure the money was, in every case, the marriage of the girls to certain chosen persons. Now, here, in a few words, is the argument of this novel of 'Golden Girls.' How can I tell, reader, whether I shall secure your attention or not? The opening chapters must in any case be dull, for the interest will entirely depend upon the characters, and to awaken interest in characters all at once is as hard as to establish a true and rational friendship in a railway-carriage. Accordingly, I begin my story with great diffidence; and this feeling is increased by my consciousness that the undertaking itself is apt to lead to satirical and even ill-natured

comments on men and women and human life. Lest, then, I should be thought a cynic, I may tell you, reader, that after having passed many years in attentive study of mankind I am growing less disposed to misanthropy every year that I live. I have, indeed, found that in the best characters—the most sincerely self-forgetting and religious—there are ineradicable blemishes; but I have found, too, that none are wholly bad, a discovery which gives more comfort than its opposite can possibly give pain. I find the humorous view of life, let serious people say what they please, wholesome in many circumstances, second only in value to the pathetic. I laugh and weep alternately as I write. Reader, if I can but move you to one-tenth of the merry or serious emotion that I feel as I write, believe me when you lay down this book you will say, ‘This author is no bad fellow.’ One thing I

promise you—you shall not be entrapped into a moral tale. Exactly what happened I will tell you, quite irrespective of any possible moral or immoral lesson. Reader, if by a tweak of the nose I could transform one of my characters from a villain to a hero, I would not tweak his nose. In this story men and women shall seem what they are, and speak as they spoke.

Now, I shall, with your permission, set before you three short introductory scenes, disconnected from each other, but still serviceable to the narrative; and this done, we shall start fairly on our story of 'Golden Girls.'

II.

A FIGHT OF LOVE WITH FATE: FATE WINNING.

A SWISS-ITALIAN lake. On the very edge of the waters stood a large house, and the waves kept rising and falling with the ut-

most gentleness against its walls. The air was full of summer, and far away, beyond the great space of still hot atmosphere, the white majestic line of the Swiss Alps dimly traversed the sky. All was quiet, for it was the heat of the day, and man and Nature alike were lulled in a warm sleep.

Only in a room of this lake-house, where an open window showed a stretch of quiet water, were three people who had nothing either of Switzerland or Italy about them. The first was a lady of about seven-and-twenty, of rare beauty, with the whitest skin, the softest chestnut hair, the loveliest eyes of blue. Her face and form might kindle many an enamoured thought in a man's breast, were it not for an unearthly look which pervaded her whole aspect. Her face was fined by wasting disease; the colour on her cheeks which kindled her loveliness into such brightness was the fire

of death; the brilliancy in her great eyes was of the sort that must soon be quenched; the hand lying carelessly on the satin coverlet had been chiselled to its delicacy by consumption. Yes; every thought of life and love would die in your breast as you regarded her; for her marvellous beauty was so full of decline and early sunset that you would think no more of tender vows, or stolen kisses, or wedding-bells, but of the unseen kingdom to which the lady is going, where they neither marry nor are given in marriage.

Beside the sick lady stood a small child's bed, and on it lay a little girl of five or six, with hair which fell down in great dark tresses, big soft eyes of grey, and an almond-shaped face which, touched as it was with melancholy, seemed remarkable in so young a creature. This child was sick too, and her toys were spread on the quilt be-

side her, and she was busy arranging one of her dolls on the pillow, talking to it all the while with great volubility.

The second girl was older—nine perhaps—and of a true English style like the sick lady, chestnut and blue, only her beauty did not promise fully to equal her mother's. She was hard at work sewing an apron for the doll which her sister was composing to sleep.

‘Mildred,’ the mother said, speaking in a faint and weary voice, ‘I want to say a few words to you and Violet. I may not be strong enough to-morrow. I am going away from you both, darlings.’

The elder girl bent over her sewing, as if she knew something; but the little one stopped in her play with the doll and looked up in great surprise.

‘Going away, mamma? But you will not be long?’

‘I shall not see you, darlings, not either of you, for a long time,’ the sick lady answered, taking little Violet’s hand in her own. ‘God is going to take me away to heaven.’

‘Can’t we go too, mamma?’ asked little Violet, looking at her mother in fixed wonder. ‘You never go anywhere without us.’

‘After a little while,’ the mother replied.

‘To-morrow, I daresay, perhaps this evening,’ little Violet said, quite comforted, and turning to her doll again. ‘Now, dolly, lie still where I put you.’

‘Mildred,’ the mother said, addressing the elder girl, who still bent over her little bit of sewing, so that her face could not be seen, ‘when I am taken away, you and little Violet will go back to England, and you will live near the church where dear papa is buried : and they will carry me and put me beside him, and you and Violet can

bring flowers and lay them there on summer evenings.'

'And you will see us then, won't you, mamma?' little Violet asked, looking up from her doll, for the last words caught her ears.

'I shall be far off,' the mother answered. 'I am going to papa, Violet. God is going to take me away to him.'

'And why won't God take us too, mamma?' asked Violet, who had lost all interest in her doll for the time. 'Then we should all be together again, and papa would ride me on his shoulder.'

'And, Mildred, you must try to remember what I am saying to you,' the dying lady continued, speaking with difficulty, for a cough harassed her at every breath. 'You and Violet will be very rich, and you will not have papa or myself to take care of you ; and, darling, you will have to take care of little

Violet as she grows up, and try to make her stronger, and see that she has always nice things to eat; and you must promise me that every morning you will make her kneel down with you, and then you and she are to say that little prayer I taught you about being good and kind, and asking God to keep you from what is wrong and naughty, and to bring you at last to papa and mamma.'

'Will He?' asked little Violet, whose grey eyes were full of wonder. 'Will it be a nice place, as nice as this?'

'A great deal nicer than this, Violet,' the mother answered, holding her little girl's hand very fast. 'The sun is always shining, and the people are always singing, and nobody ever is sick, and nobody ever cries; and then we shall all four be quite happy, and never leave each other again.'

‘But why can’t me and Milly go now, mamma?’ little Violet persisted.

‘Because, my darling, you have to live here for a long time, and be very rich, and know a great many people, and do all sorts of things, and you will be very, very happy, I hope; and then, when it is all over, if you have been very good, God will bring you safe to papa and myself.’

For the moment little Violet was satisfied, and the mother once again tried to speak to Mildred.

‘You must take care of Violet, darling; you are the elder; you understand a great deal more than she does. You must be like mamma to little Violet when mamma herself is gone for ever.’

Violet was her mother’s darling, and now the poor lady’s voice began to tremble and to break.

Brave little Mildred, who realised the

dreadful truth, had all this time been bending over her work, and with great firmness had been biting her lips and keeping back her tears. But now her resolution quite gave way ; the tremor of her mother's voice overcame her. Throwing down the apron, she cast her arms about her mother's neck, sobbing piteously.

‘Mamma, mamma ! don’t go ! Don’t leave us ! stay a little longer ! Oh, mamma, mamma !’

At sight of her sister’s sorrow little Violet burst out crying too, and the mother, unable any longer to restrain her own grief, bowed her head over Mildred, caressing the child, but weeping as she did so. There these three sorrowing creatures were. Outside spread the still waters and the bright sunshine, and far away the belt of snowy hills ; but they heeded not the language of glory and peace. Why should they ? And yet

the whole scene might have been taken for a figure of what our good poets sing—that outside and around the great spectacle of earthly sorrow there lies, unseen, an embracing circle of divine love and joy.

III.

A FIGHT OF FLATTERY WITH FOLLY : FLATTERY
WINNING.

THE suburb of an English town. In a handsome drawing-room furnished, however, with more profusion than taste, four persons sat together—a tall, imposing, old-fashioned, elderly man; a woman about thirty-five, richly clad, and of a very good style of matronly beauty; a meagre, pinched man of fifty, with shoulders shrivelled up very high, and a general expression which suggested that he chose this way of keeping his ears warm, because it was cheap; a small boy of a dollish prettiness, who occupied

himself with card castles, and was occasionally regarded with great interest by the three elders.

‘Oh, Jerome,’ the lady said, with a bland and sycophantic smile, ‘you are too clever—too severe ; one feels quite afraid of you.’

This insinuating speech was an answer to some remark made by the old-fashioned gentleman ; he seemed much gratified.

‘Do not say clever!’ he cried, chuckling with much enjoyment. ‘Do not say severe. You don’t mean it. Beatrice,’ he added, looking at the lady, ‘do you really think, now, that I am clever and severe?’

‘I know what Daniel and I always say,’ Beatrice replied, judging a little bit of work as she spread it out on the table before her ; ‘we always say——’

‘What?’ the old-fashioned gentleman asked, greatly interested, and the more so because she stopped.

‘Why,’ Daniel remarked, rising from an account-book over which he had been poring, and walking to the fireplace, where, as if by habit, he put his hands behind his back, although it was summer, ‘we always say that for a clear head, a cool judgment, and a sharp eye for a knave *or* a fool, there is nobody in England like Jerome Dawe.’

‘That is what you say, is it?’ Jerome Dawe exclaimed, roaring with laughter, and slapping his knee in his delight. ‘But you don’t really mean it, Daniel—not altogether! A cool head! a clear judgment! a sharp eye for a knave or a fool!—eh? Well, I won’t say, but I *have* put my finger on a fool or two in my life—and a knave!’

‘This I can say,’ Daniel continued, speaking slowly and checking off his thoughts on his fingers to mark the accuracy with which his mind was working, ‘in the course of a

long life I have never, never met your match, Jerome, so far as headpiece goes.'

Jerome Dawe burst out laughing anew, and slapped his leg once more.

'You don't mean it, Daniel! I do not believe you mean it! I should like to hear you say it again, just to see if you mean it. So far as headpiece goes—eh? Well, well, I will not say that I have not something of the kind between my shoulders.'

'I know this,' Beatrice said, looking up at Jerome Dawe with great composure, 'if you could but hear what Daniel says of you in private! He won't now, when you are here; but, if you heard him in private, I think you would be flattered.'

'Flattered, should I?' repeated Jerome Dawe. 'Don't repeat anything to me, Beatrice, for I hate flattery! What he says of me in private, eh?'

'Shall I tell you what he said last night?'

the lady rejoined, looking candidly at herself as she fixed her eyes on Jerome Dawe. 'We were talking about yourself and your brother, and Daniel said——'

'Beatrice!' Daniel called out from the hearthrug, 'I will not allow this. I forbid you to say another word.'

The lady laughed with great good-humour.

'Shall I obey him, Jerome?' she asked.

'It's a delicate matter,' replied Jerome, jocosely. '"Never interfere between man and wife" is my rule. Still, Beatrice, if you don't mind whispering in my ear——'

So, entering into the humour of his suggestion, Jerome Dawe bent his head close to Beatrice, while Daniel called out again, in a serious voice,

'Now mind! I have said you shall not repeat it.'

However, beyond this, Daniel made no

movement to interfere, and Jerome Dawe put his ear close to the lady's lips, like a pitcher to a dropping well, and she whispered a long sentence.

'What was the last word?' inquired Jerome Dawe, having missed one particular morsel. Beatrice repeated something in his ear.

'Said *that*, did he?' Jerome Dawe exclaimed, lifting up a face radiant with delight. 'Daniel said that to you? Last night, too? Oh, Daniel, you dog, what a judge of character you are!'

In the abundance of his gratification Jerome Dawe made as if he would give Daniel a fictitious poke in the ribs, an overture which Daniel received sulkily.

'I don't approve of this sort of thing,' he said. 'It was wrong of Beatrice, and wrong of you, Jerome.'

'Why, how do you know what she has

been saying ?' Jerome Dawe replied, more facetiously than ever. 'Perhaps she only told me the day of the month !'

'There he goes again, Beatrice !' Daniel remarked to his wife, quite struck by this clever diversion on the part of Jerome Dawe. 'You cannot have him ! You *cannot* have him !'

He struck his palm with his knuckles to express his admiration with greater force ; and Jerome Dawe chuckled and rubbed his hands together and twinkled his eyes and looked a wondrous clever fellow, with a dash of good-nature about him, strong and apt, and facetious through it all, you know.

'Now, Jerome,' Daniel remarked, assuming a business face all at once, 'I want to have a little talk with you about these Walsingham children. How is the mother ?'

'She died last week,' Jerome Dawe answered. 'I was just going to tell you. I

had a letter from her maid this morning.'

'And those poor orphan girls—where are they?' inquired Daniel.

'On their way to England,' the other replied. 'I must take them in for a few days, and then make arrangements for the future.'

'You are sole guardian, I believe?' Daniel remarked, interrogatively.

'Sole guardian,' Jerome Dawe answered, with importance. 'And let me tell you, Daniel, where such a great fortune is concerned guardianship is no trifle.'

'What may the fortune be?' Daniel asked, seeming, however, to lose interest in the conversation, for he returned to his account-book, and weighed its columns, and calculated with his lips.

'One hundred thousand apiece—that at this moment,' said Jerome Dawe. 'In ten years' time, when the money has rolled

over and over, no one can say what it will be.'

'A fortune like that—rolling over and over,' Daniel remarked. 'Five and five are ten, and five fifteen'—for so little did he seem to care about the fortune that he fell back into his own figures. 'A fortune of this kind, rolling over and over, as you say, might in ten years amount to a quarter of a million. By the way, Jerome, did you not mention that one daughter is delicate?'

'Yes, the younger—Violet. The mother told me some time ago that she was afraid Violet would never live to be a woman.'

'In that case,' replied Daniel, still figuring away and inserting small addition sums in his talk, 'the other girl will be worth—four and three are seven—a quarter of a million when she comes of age—five from eight leaves three. A nice fortune for somebody.'

But Daniel did not manifest any interest whatever in this quarter of a million. It was no concern of his. Of course not.

‘How old is the elder girl?’ Daniel asked once more, after fresh acts of addition and subtraction. He glanced at his little son, who was absorbed in his card castles.

‘The elder girl is nine,’ replied Jerome Dawe. ‘Nine and one month.’

‘Just two years younger than Eugene,’ Daniel remarked, still with his eyes on his son. ‘Yes, as you say, Jerome, it will be a charge—an onerous charge. I am glad it is you, not me, who has the care of those children.’

‘Nonsense, Daniel!’ Beatrice cried out, interposing with an air of impatience. ‘Charge, indeed! As if Jerome were not equal to such a thing! Some men might

blunder. Jerome will be father—mother—guardian—friend—everything to those girls.'

'You think so, Beatrice, do you?' Jerome Dawe remarked. 'You think I will manage? Father—mother—guardian—friend—eh? Well, perhaps I will. Some men might blunder—eh? Well, perhaps they might, Beatrice—perhaps they might.'

'But this is such a *very* extraordinary case,' Daniel replied, shaking his head with an air of mistrust. 'How to bring those girls up—how to shield them from designing people and adventurers; why, they will be courted before they are in their teens! Where there is money, Jerome, people will do anything. Oh, money, money!'

'Leave the girls to me,' Jerome Dawe said, confidently. 'I have my own plan

for bringing them up ; my own settled plan for keeping them in seclusion and out of harm's way. I will tell you what it is, and you will not call me a stupid fellow.'

Daniel looked blank at this announcement.

'Settled a plan already, Jerome ?'

'Yes, settled a plan already,' answered Jerome, triumphantly. 'Listen to it——'

'I have found you out!' the lady exclaimed, interrupting him suddenly, and throwing up her hands in admiration. 'I know the plan! Well, Jerome, for a far-sighted man you exceed everybody I have ever met.'

'You cannot know my plan, Beatrice,' said Jerome Dawe, looking at her in surprise. 'That is impossible.'

'I know it, Jerome,' she answered. 'I see it all. Splendid idea! Capital idea! Just such an idea as would occur to a man

like yourself. Still, Jerome, there will be obstacles in the way: I see obstacles in the way.'

'Beatrice,' cried Jerome Dawe, 'you cannot know my plan. It does not concern anybody with whom you are acquainted. I will tell you all about it in ten words, and then you will see——'

'I know! I know!' the lady cried, running on in great haste, and determined that he should not have the first word. 'You want Daniel and myself to bring up the children. You have settled that we are to take them. Oh, Jerome, what a man you are! It is really dangerous to have to do with you, you are so clever in all you do!'

'Beatrice,' cried Jerome Dawe again, and this time solemnly, 'such an idea never entered my mind.'

'Look at his eye, Daniel!' the lady cried. She was now at Jerome Dawe's side,

caressing him. 'Look at the twinkle in his eye! Which are we to believe? The tongue or the eye? the clever tongue or the twinkling eye? Oh, Jerome, Jerome, not to tell us before!'

Jerome Dawe did not speak for a minute, and was apparently collecting himself for an effort.

Then, looking at the lady with a roguish expression, he said,

'You think it was clever, do you?'

'Oh, Jerome, Jerome!' she cried again, as if regular speech would fail to measure his craft. 'You are too deep for us altogether!'

'I kept my secret well, did I?' Jerome Dawe asked, seeming more and more to recover himself. 'You guessed nothing?'

'Never, till ten minutes ago,' she answered.

'I am a sly fellow, am I?' Jerome Dawe

inquired, chuckling. 'You would call me a sly fellow, eh?'

'Too sly for me,' Daniel remarked, in a tone of unfeigned admiration. 'But it will not do, Jerome. We could not take these children.'

'Why not, Dan?' asked Jerome Dawe. 'Your reason?'

'Well, you see,' replied Daniel, in a hesitating way, 'there are threescore and ten objections. It would be—it would seem—well, I do not quite know where to begin. Perhaps I may be wrong. Only I do not like the thing, Jerome—I do not like the thing.'

'Daniel,' said Beatrice, with a reproving air, 'if Jerome thinks it wise, we may trust his judgment. What is the use of saying every day that we rely on his opinion, and then refusing to act upon it at the first moment of apparent difficulty?'

‘Well,’ Daniel replied, pondering hard, ‘we must think it over. We must be guided by Jerome. There is one thing, the elder girl would be a nice playmate for Eugene.’

Every reader has seen that the idea of thus providing for his wards had never even crossed the mind of Jerome Dawe. And yet now he half believed that the arrangement, into which he had been thus blandly and scientifically inveigled, was of his own devising. And this pompous, shallow, and ductile Ass is the keeper and the guardian of our dear little Golden Girls!

IV.

A FIGHT OF A GREAT MAN WITH A SMALL BOY:

NEITHER WINNING.

IN one corner of an ill-furnished bed-room, which the slanting ceiling showed to be at the top of a house, there stood, in a sullen attitude, a boy of eleven or twelve. Sullen

is the word to describe both his attitude and his face, and yet he seemed a lad not ignoble by nature. His hair was matted over his forehead, as if he had been struggling and crying; his dress was dusty and disordered; and his hands and cheeks alike were sorely in need of washing. Yet it was a taking face after all, ready for good-nature, and lit by a pair of eyes of honest brown. The lad's frame, too, was a fine one, broad-chested, and with many a sign of approaching manly vigour. Such a boy one of our wise and thoughtful English mothers would regard with anxiety and reflection, and would resolve to guide him now with indulgence and now with kind repression, kindling his affections, guiding his strong physical nature into wholesome channels, and driving backward the brutish part of his disposition. For in this boy any penetrating eye can see there is what, for lack of a finer word, one must

call a brutish part ; and the next few years will either draw it into ruinous predominance, or fix it within safe boundaries of self-restraint and virtue and honour, making it the spring of energy for a noble and happy life.

For this boy there was at present no motherly care. He stood crouched in the corner, dirty, savage, glaring. The brutish part was coming out pretty strongly at that particular moment.

Opposite to him, a black stick held menacingly in his hand, his whole bearing expressing aversion and reproof, stood the portly Jerome Dawe. Mingling with his punitive air there was something of alarm, as if the boy were a kind of wild cat, who might make a sudden leap and do mischief.

‘You are a rogue,’ said Jerome Dawe.
‘Roguery, roguery is a detestable thing.’

‘I am not a rogue, no more than you!’

the boy answered, in just the tone one would expect.

‘You took that five-shilling piece off my library table this morning,’ Jerome Dawe continued. ‘Don’t add sin to sin, Sholto. You know you took it.’

‘I never saw it,’ the boy cried. ‘I did not go into the library all day.’

‘You took that five shillings!’ Dawe repeated, with dogged grandeur. ‘I am as sure that you took it as if I had seen you. How do you know, Sholto, but I did see you.’

‘You could not have seen me!’ the boy answered back, furiously, ‘and you could not say you saw me without telling a lie.’

‘For daring to talk to me about telling a lie,’ retorted Jerome Dawe, with awful solemnity, ‘you shall stay here till this time tomorrow, and live on bread and water. If you had confessed and been repentant, I might have forgiven you. As it is, here you stay,

Sholto, and we will see if you talk about telling lies to-morrow.'

'I tell you what,' shrieked the boy, as Jerome Dawe was preparing to leave the room, 'you are what my father always called you.'

'What was that?' Jerome Dawe demanded, indignant, but curious.

'A bully, selfish, cruel, vain!' the boy went on, almost insane in his fury and grief. 'He said you cared for nobody but those Ruddocks; and that for them you would sacrifice everybody you knew; and that you only cared for them because they flattered you; and that they could flatter you as much as they liked, you are such a fool—there!'

'Did your father, did my brother, say all that?' Jerome Dawe asked, thunder-struck by this cannonade of compliments. 'Did he dare to say all that?'

‘Yes, and it’s true, every word!’ the boy answered, still in the same headlong way. ‘And that is just how you treat me. Eugene is everything, and what is Eugene to you? And, no matter what I do, I cannot please you, and I will never try again as long as I live.’

‘Eugene is a gentleman,’ said Jerome Dawe, ‘and a boy of honour. You, Sholto, are a savage, and you will go to the devil, as savages invariably do. For what you have said to me now you shall have another day here; after that’—this was said with some jocosity and sprightliness—‘perhaps you will know how to behave!’

‘I won’t stay—I won’t stay!’ the boy shrieked; and he made a dash at Jerome Dawe, and wound about his leg, and tore at his coat like a savage indeed. Jerome Dawe turned pale, and seemed for a moment disposed to let the boy carry his point,

when suddenly poor Sholto, making a false move, let go his uncle's leg. The uncle, with great celerity, whipped through the door, and locked it on the other side. Then in reply to the volley of kicks which rattled on the panel, Jerome Dawe, having recovered his dignity and courage, called out, in a tremendous voice,

‘There you stay, Master Sholto, on bread and water, until you tell me you are sorry. Oh, kick away, my boy!’ he cried, becoming quite facetious, after feeling his leg and finding that he was not really bitten or lacerated; ‘when you kick through the door I shall let you off the rest.’

The reply from within to this sarcasm was such a renewal of kicking, that it seemed as if Jerome Dawe's good faith would soon be put to the test; and he himself waited to see if the door was as strong as

he thought. Presently the kicks relaxed in vigour somewhat, which Jerome Dawe noticing, with a humorous expression went proudly downstairs, with the air of a man who has tamed a lion.

At the foot of the first flight he met his housekeeper, an elderly wizen-faced woman, dressed in an absurd travesty of fashion and affectation of youth.

‘What can the matter be?’ she asked. Her preposterous air exactly suited her preposterous appearance.

‘That boy again,’ replied Jerome Dawe. ‘He stole five shillings off my library table this morning.’

‘That he did not,’ the woman exclaimed, snatching at the opportunity of correcting her master. ‘I have the money in my pocket. It was not safe to leave it about.’

‘You took the five shillings, did you, Matty?’ asked Jerome Dawe, with the voice of a man who might scold.

‘I did,’ she retorted, boldly. ‘What right have you to leave money about in that way? You ought to know better!’

‘Perhaps I ought,’ Jerome Dawe replied, all the premonition of scolding vanishing. ‘But what am I to do with Master Sholto? I have shut him up for to-day and to-morrow.’

‘Leave him shut up,’ the woman answered, insolently. ‘He will want it for something else. Come down; your dinner is ready.’

‘You are quite right, Matty,’ Jerome Dawe answered. ‘He will want it for something else. Besides, it would never do to confess to the fellow that we had made a mistake. At the same time, Matty, let him have some dinner.’

‘Leave his dinner to me,’ Matty replied, in her impudent way. ‘You go and eat your own.’

CHAPTER I.

A PICTURE OF AN OLD-FASHIONED GENTLEMAN—
SHOWING WHAT STRANGE PEOPLE FOUNDED
GOOD FAMILIES, AND WHAT ODD DESCENDANTS
THEY BEGOT.

‘To bed, Sholto, do you hear? To bed
this minute!’

‘Eugene, my boy, you may sit up if you
choose.’

These sentences came not from two
speakers, but from one. Because they were
divided by a pause, and more sharply divid-
ed by a change of tone from snappish to
caressing, I have written each by itself.

But who was this speaker with two voices issuing such contrary commands ?

He was none other than the Jerome Dawe who has already figured in our Introduction, but who has not yet been fully described. A tall, elderly gentleman he was, of portly figure, which was well fashioned in spite of the large bones that framed it. Jerome Dawe had a grand-looking head, and his spacious forehead was the more suggestive of mental power because his hair was brushed upward and stood straight in air, disclosing two fine temples. His shirt was frilled in the antique style ; his massive seals hung from the now-forgotten fob ; and his well-shaped legs were breeched to the knees, and thence clad in silk stockings. He was to the eye a gentleman of the old school. Possibly at that date three or four dozen like himself in the United Kingdom clung to the attire

of the past ; but he had become now such a palpable antiquity, such a visible anachronism, that people stared at him as he walked by, and wondered if he were come from a masquerade. His imposing step, his magnificent carriage, his dignified air, arrested any tendency to mirth ; while his long ebony stick, with Shakespeare's head carved on the handle, suggested that it would in any case be prudent not to smile until he had fairly passed by.

He was not walking now, but sitting in his arm-chair, erect and imperative. His voice was strong and clear, and he had altogether a leonine appearance, which might be described as formidable, and the growl with which he ordered Sholto to bed carried out the leonine resemblance with great vivacity.

Of Mr. Jerome Dawe, my reader, I am sure you are anxious to hear something

more. Accordingly, I shall begin with his pedigree, which was of historical importance. By birth he was a gentleman, as indeed his attire, however fantastic, proclaimed. His descent was long and fully ascertained. Read in the light of plain fact, his first known ancestor was a person of good wind and muscle, not over-nice as to the distinction between mine and thine. This original Dawe fell in with a great political character and conqueror who was also renowned for his wind and muscle, and still more for the rapidity with which he deprived other people of the use of theirs. This conqueror was no creature of fiction, but a man with a real name and address like you and me; and some people say he was a saint, and some people say he was a villain; but for my part—not having been in the conqueror's mind—I cannot tell which he was, nor does the question in the least concern us.

What does concern us is that Dawe the First, who came from nowhere, made himself useful to the conqueror, and for so doing got a large slice of land which a fortnight or so before had been in the peaceful and undisputed possession of a third party. This third party happening to disagree with the conqueror on some little point of order, found himself all of a sudden swinging from a tree, with every alternative of behaviour over at once and for ever. Having in this gratifying way been installed in respectable landed society, the Dawes set about behaving themselves, and, after Falstaff, living cleanly as noblemen should. They became generals, and deans, and magistrates, and whatever beside was dignified. They wore scarlet, and gold, and fur, and lawn. They preached before kings. They sat on judicial benches and sent evil-doers to prison. And now there

was such a perspective of Dawes in a long ancestral line, with collateral branches, that it was quite a procession. There were military Dawes, naval Dawes, judicial Dawes, canonical Dawes, decanal Dawes, even episcopal Dawes. There were Dawes who lay in Westminster Abbey. There were Dawes who had died bravely in defence of their country, watering foreign clay with good English blood. There were Dawes who had been gentlemen of England and lived at home at ease. There were Dawes who had been fruitful and multiplied and replenished the Dawe. And in this brilliant crowd there could scarcely be seen skulking far behind the figure of the first Dawe of them all: which indeed was fortunate for the rest of the family. The less that was seen of that personage the better for all who bore his name.

By many generations of this respectability

was our Jerome Dawe separated from his renowned original; and the grave and portentous elderly man who now inherited the name was in many ways what is called a gentleman. He had certain ideas which are peculiar to gentlemen, and he had been associated with gentlemen all his life.

This majestic and remarkable man sat now gazing at two small boys. One was our little Eugene, a slender delicate lad, with white cheeks, neat features, regular teeth, and remarkably thin hands; the other, that same Sholto whom we before saw in a condition of unmerited disgrace. Little Eugene stood near to Mr. Jerome Dawe, regarding him with the confidence of a favourite, while Sholto kept prudently on the opposite side of the table, casting an occasional misgiving glance at the stick Shakespeare, which lay dangerously close to the great man's right hand.

‘To bed, Sholto,’ Mr. Jerome Dawe repeated, with increased severity—‘to bed this instant, sir!’

Whereupon Sholto made a dash out of the room, shutting the door as he went with a crash which shook the house to its foundations.

‘Back, sir!’ roared Jerome Dawe, turning purple with passion—‘back here, sir, or I’ll—I’ll——’

What he would do he either left to the boy’s imagination to supply, or found his own unable to invent; but his terrible voice followed the flying youth up-stairs, and brought him back to the room half-trembling, yet not wholly able to keep his countenance, and so giving way to covert explosions of laughter, which little Eugene marked with evident wonder and fear.

‘How dare you slam the door, sir?’ roared Mr. Jerome Dawe.

‘Please, sir—’

Sholto cast an eye at Shakespeare and hesitated ; then his face lit up with a joke.

‘It wasn’t me, uncle ; it was the wind.’

At which impudent falsehood he hastily put his hand to his mouth and tried to stifle another eruption of mirth.

‘I tell you what it is, Sholto,’ the uncle said, raising Shakespeare in the air in a way which reduced the youth to instantaneous and unfeigned sobriety, ‘*that* is what I shall do.’

He smote the air three times in a very suggestive way ; but, satisfied for once with the threat, waved his left hand and said once more,

‘To bed, sir—to bed this instant.’

At the word, Sholto bounded through the door and up-stairs with the rapidity of a hare and the noise of a war-horse. His feet were heard crashing two flights over-

head before his uncle quite realized that he had left the room.

‘That boy is incorrigible,’ cried Mr. Jerome Dawe, now addressing little Eugene. ‘Call him—he has left the door open now—call him back, Eugene. The fellow must be cured.’

‘Oh, let me shut it,’ cried little Eugene, anxious, it seemed, to save Sholto’s bones, for Shakespeare was again working through the air in a most menacing fashion. ‘He will only slam it again.’

And with an affected dancing sort of step he tripped across the room, and closed the door as gently and carefully as if it had been a lady sealing a love-letter. Then he came over and seated himself daintily.

‘Now, Eugene,’ Jerome Dawe said, ‘take down your fiddle, and you shall have a lesson.’

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH MRS. SALLY BADGER INVADES THIS
HISTORY.

‘ELBOW down, Eugene. Mind your bow arm. Fingers there—so. The thumb just a *little* more over. There! now you may begin.’

So little Eugene with the fiddle tucked under his chin, and looking very deformed and uncomfortable, began slowly drawing the bow across the string, and ‘Rousseau’s Dream’ dimly emerged from the concord of sound. Jerome Dawe watched him with great interest, holding an imaginary fiddle—his own priceless Cremona lying meanwhile on the floor—and moving an imagin-

ary bow, as a model for the little pupil, who, trying to secure his violin with his chin, and casting his eyes upward to watch his preceptor, was an illustration of embarrassment not easily to be paralleled.

To add to the poor boy's perplexity, while he was so engaged the door reopened softly without attracting Jerome Dawe's attention, and there, on the mat outside, stood Sholto, reproducing each of his uncle's motions with the most laughable fidelity, while by a significant twist of his nose he symbolised the noise which he dared not make. The three stood in this way; little Eugene fiddling; Jerome Dawe fingering the air, and drawing his bow with the utmost elegance; and Sholto, on the mat, gesticulating and grimacing with a violence which made the absolute noiselessness of his proceedings more comical than anything else he did. At last poor little Eugene,

who long had struggled with his feelings, could hold out no longer. He broke into a fit of laughter.

‘What is the matter, Eugene?’ Jerome Dawe asked, his eyes twinkling, however, for he liked to see his favourite enjoy himself. ‘There is nothing to laugh at, that I can see.’

‘The fiddle tickled me,’ replied the boy; and, with a despairing glance at Sholto for mercy, he shoved the instrument under his chin again, and recommenced his playing.

Jerome Dawe, with great gravity and interest, postured himself anew, and once more, with his Barmecide fiddle and bow, modelled himself before his tortured nephew’s sight. And Sholto, on the mat, turned his uncle’s every posture into some monkey antic, until poor Eugene was on the verge of another outbreak. But relief

came unexpectedly. Sholto vanished all at once, and, for a moment, inexplicably. The appearance of Martha Spring, however, explained his flight; and that estimable woman walked into the room with her nose high in the air, emblematic of scorn, and a backward glance of her eyes which betokened fear.

‘Mr. and Mrs. Badger,’ she announced; and with a prudent depression of her nose before the visitors could observe that feature she took herself off.

The visitors entered in the following way: Mrs. Badger, a tall woman with a hooked nose and heavy eyebrows, advanced with a military step and a general air of command. She exhibited that kind of manner which we observe in pictures of battles, where a commander with lifted sabre leads his men into the heart of the conflict. Upon her ensued Mr. Badger—a man as small as his

wife was tall—plump, easy-going, with a meek and sleek face. He sidled, rather than walked, into the room; his hands hung beside him with a limpness which told of feebleness of soul; he said, ‘How do you do, Jerome?’ in a conciliating voice; and he sat down on the edge of a chair with an apologetic air, as if he might be expected to have chosen the floor. After him came a boy of ten or twelve—a boy with a spacious and round face—flat, like a cheese, but with immense colour in it. Mrs. Badger, having emitted a salutation like the crack of a pistol, seated herself with a sharp, decisive action, sudden, angular, and alarming.

‘This is a warm evening, Jerome,’ Mr. Badger remarked, in a soft and affable tone, quite a pipe of peace.

‘Yes, Samuel—yes,’ Jerome Dawe replied, assenting to the statement, but with

stateliness, 'it is a warm evening—very warm.'

'It is nothing of the kind!' said Mrs. Badger, dashing into conversation in a gladiatorial manner which made Jerome Dawe jump: but Samuel Badger smiled in unruffled placidity.

'*I consider,*' Mrs Badger said, looking round to see the effect of her behaviour—'*I consider the evening sweetly mild. I do wish,*' continued Mrs. Badger, looking straight at Jerome Dawe,—'*I do wish people would find something to talk about besides the weather.*'

Jerome Dawe shifted in his chair and still looked very uneasy. Mr. Badger sat with the same fat smile upon his face. If a fly had hummed past his ear he might have showed more uneasiness.

'Jerome,' the lady said, after this pause. She ejected the two syllables in her mili-

tant way, and made the great man jump again.

‘Yes, Sally.’

‘What time does that boy go to bed?’

‘Well, Sally,’ Jerome Dawe replied, in the hesitating and ambiguous manner which he greatly affected, ‘you see I can scarcely say that I have any fixed rule.’

‘You ought to have a fixed rule,’ was the retort. ‘Send him to bed now.’

‘Eugene,’ Jerome Dawe said, with as imperial an air as he could assume under the circumstances, ‘go to bed, my boy.’

Whereupon little Eugene, setting his fiddle carefully on the floor, and going round the room with much address, said good night to everybody, including Master Badger. Mrs. Sally Badger regarded his outstretched hand with uncertainty for a moment, but took it at last, and used it like the handle of a pump. Little Eugene then

walked out with an elegant air, closing the door gently as he went.

‘A very well-behaved lad,’ Jerome Dawe remarked, noting the little fellow’s behaviour with gratification—‘an uncommonly well-behaved boy.’

‘That is your opinion, Jerome,’ the lady said.

And simultaneously her conciliating husband ventured to say,

‘I quite think with you, Jerome.’

Upon which his lady, wheeling upon him with great asperity, called out,

‘Samuel, please wait till you are spoken to!’

Her whole behaviour produced a visible effect upon Jerome Dawe. By this time he showed scarcely a trace of his habitual pomp and dignity, and could hardly be identified with the terrible rebuker who had so lately threatened his nephew. And

Mrs. Sally Badger, who through all her aggressions of manner and speech kept her eyes keenly set on Jerome Dawe, marking every change of his features, said here, in the same minatory style,

‘Now that the boy is gone, Jerome, I have something to say to you.’

CHAPTER III.

SHOWS BY EXPERIMENT THAT A FIDDLE CAN SOMETIMES MAKE AS MUCH NOISE AS A DRUM.

‘SALLY,’ said Jerome, with deepening uneasiness, ‘I am always delighted to hear anything you have to say.’

‘She speaks so to the point, you see,’ Mr. Badger interjected.

‘Samuel,’ his wife said, more determined than ever, ‘*will* you wait till you are spoken to.’

‘I was only making a little preface to your remarks, my dear,’ poor Samuel rejoined, trying to cover his humiliation with a witticism.

‘Thank you,’ retorted his wife. ‘I can make my own prefaces.’ At which word she fixed her gaze on Jerome Dawe with significance, and saw that he shifted in his chair a third time.

‘You are appointed guardian to the little Walsinghams?’

The question was inflected interrogatively, so Jerome Dawe answered,

‘I am.’

‘Of course you will have to place them under the care of some experienced person who will bring them up?’

‘So it appears,’ he replied again.

‘Jerome,’ the lady said, ‘I will take charge of those children.’

This might appear to be an offer, but the tone in which it was delivered showed that it was an announcement.

‘Sally,’ Jerome Dawe replied, turning red with confusion, ‘I must consider the matter.’

‘Nothing of the kind,’ she answered, with astonishing decision. ‘We are poor. The money allowance will be of great importance to us; and, being your relatives, nothing is more likely than that we should undertake the care of your two wards.’

‘That is quite true,’ the unhappy Jerome Dawe said, ‘but——’

‘*But!*’ the lady cried, catching him up. ‘Shall I tell you, Jerome, what is on the other side of that “but”? You have promised the care of the children to your dear friends the Ruddocks!’

‘Oh, no, Sally,’ he answered, speaking for the first time with some sign of courage, ‘I have not *promised*.’

‘Something very like it then,’ she retorted, scornfully. She was not going to split straws with him. ‘No matter: the children shall not go to the Ruddocks.’

‘ You think not, Sally ?’ said he, submissively.

‘ If she says “ not,” ’ Samuel remarked, with the air of a man of experience, ‘ “ not ” it will be.’

‘ Samuel,’ his wife cried, angrily, ‘ hold your tongue ! I was going to say, Jerome, that Ruddock and his wife think themselves very clever. I see through their plan. These girls are to be brought up in their house. In due time one girl is to marry Eugene.’

‘ Now really, Sally, with your good sense, to talk of marriage, when the boy is twelve and the girl not ten !’

‘ It is not *my* good sense that is concerned,’ Mrs. Badger replied, sarcastically. ‘ However, I came here to-night to tell you that it will not do. People would talk. It would make a scandal. Besides, we want the money allowance, Jerome,’ she said,

looking him full in the face. 'You promise the care of those children to me before I leave this room!'

It was a curious study. Jerome Dawe was masculine, wealthy, pompous, and with a reputation for moral as well as physical courage. Mrs. Badger was only his niece; she was poor; she had lowered herself by her marriage. All the odds in a struggle of this kind were against her; and yet so well did she know her relative, and so daringly had she reduced him to an extremity of fear, that she was altogether his mistress. It was most awkward for Jerome Dawe. He knew that he had virtually, if not literally, promised the care of the children to the Ruddocks. The interest of the Ruddocks he had really at heart, and even now one syllable delivered with proper emphasis would set him free of this oppressive Sally Badger. But Jerome

could not frame that syllable, and Mrs. Badger knew he could not, and she kept her gaze set upon him with unrelaxing severity.

‘You promise, Jerome?’

‘Yes—I promise.’

‘Samuel and myself are to have charge of those children until they come of age.’

‘You are to have charge of those children until they come of age.’

Jerome Dawe attempted to say this with something of the air of a free agent. Even in his extreme subjection he clung to the fiction of independence.

‘You hear, Samuel?’ the lady said, registering a witness of the contract on the spot.

‘Oh, yes, I hear,’ her husband answered.

‘You see, my dear, Jerome has a particularly clear voice, I have repeatedly noticed Jerome’s particularly clear voice.’

‘I have to call on the Ruddocks in the morning,’ the managing woman continued, reading her relative’s thoughts. ‘I shall tell them of this arrangement.’

‘You will?’ exclaimed Jerome Dawe, expressing his relief at this offer, before he saw how humiliating it was to himself. ‘That will be kind, Sally.’

‘They will be angry,’ the lady said. ‘I like to see such people angry. They will storm ; so they may. If they do not storm, and pretend to be satisfied, they will dislike this upset all the more. It is not the first time I have made these people feel, and it shall not be the last. However, Jerome, I will say you have acted most handsomely.’

Before Jerome Dawe could taste the flavour of a compliment for which he must pay so dearly, a singular and alarming noise outside attracted their attention, and immediately the door was thrown open, and

Sholto was seen on the threshold desperately engaged with a cock and a hen. He had been trying to put the fowls into harness for the purpose of driving them in triumph round the parlour, and the birds objecting to the preliminary arrangements a disturbance arose.

The upshot was that the door flew open, and the cock and hen broke loose, and dashed wildly into the room with a most maddening flutter and clutter. All was confusion in an instant. Mrs. Badger jumped on a chair, and began to gesticulate as if she were delivering a public oration ; her husband tried to secure the hen ; Sholto tore wildly after the fugitive cock ; and Jerome Dawe caught up 'Shakespeare' and made after his nephew. The results were dreadful. 'Shakespeare' was used with terrific effect ; Sholto yelled ; the cock and hen cluttered and zig-zagged in all direc-

tions; and finally, as Jerome Dawe was pursuing his nephew round the table, the boy stumbled and fell right upon the Cremona, which with a terrific crash ceased as a musical instrument to be. This was like a stroke of enchantment. The whole company stood still; the very cock and hen stopped in their wild career, and seemed afraid even to wink; Jerome Dawe stood petrified, and 'Shakespeare' fell from his hand; and poor Sholto, who had turned as pale as death, after a second's irresolution, bolted from the room.

Mr. Badger was the first to speak. He took up the shattered violin, which was smashed like a bandbox and hopelessly ruined. After regarding the crushed carcase in silence for a full minute, Mr. Badger said, in his pacific way,

'Do you know, I don't really think—I don't really think'—he said this for the

second time with the most milky mildness—
'that this instrument will ever be of any
great use again.'

CHAPTER IV.

TWO VERY YOUNG GENTLEMEN, SITTING ON THE
END OF A BED, DISCUSS A VERY ANCIENT
QUESTION.

It was late that night, and poor Sholto had received such discipline as effectually prevented sleep from closing his eyelids. He had crept into little Eugene's room for sympathy, and Eugene had inspected with great commiseration certain weals which his friend bore as remembrancers of the evening's frolic. The fact was, Jerome Dawe had tried to make the boy cry, which Sholto, being a stout-hearted little fellow, would not do. He bore his castigation patiently enough, knowing he deserved it ; but not a

groan could his uncle flog out of him. Now, Jerome was hot-tempered, and moreover very valiant, and he went on flogging until the thought struck him that it might be awkward if he had to explain his proceedings at length before a coroner. This no sooner occurred to his mind than with great expedition he hurried his nephew off to bed. Sholto's punishment had indeed been cruelly severe, and was the less to be justified as it had turned out that the crushed violin was not the Cremona after all, but only that on which Eugene was learning his notes, which was worth no more than a few shillings.

However, by this time Sholto had recovered from the severer pains, and little Eugene had expressed all the sympathy he could; and now the two small boys were sitting perched on the bed in their night attire, with their hands clasped round their knees, looking like the pictures

of penguins in the natural-history books.

‘Are you fond of girls, Eugene?’ asked Sholto, when some previous subject of conversation was exhausted.

‘Girls!’ exclaimed Eugene. ‘Fond of girls! No, I hate girls!’

‘I don’t,’ replied Sholto, thoughtfully. ‘Not altogether. I think they are rather nice.’

‘Oh, I hate them,’ little Eugene said, emphatically.

‘There is rather a nice girl at the haberdasher’s shop on the hill,’ Sholto continued. ‘I think she is the daughter of the shopman, and I know her name is Ellen. She has got very nice eyes; I don’t exactly know the colour, but they look capital. I don’t know that she cares for me, but I go and buy things of her; only last time she charged me sixpence for a threepenny bottle of scent. I don’t think that was fair; do you, Eugene?’

‘Certainly not,’ Eugene replied, energetically. ‘Catch me buying scent of any girl!’

‘However,’ said Sholto, ‘I did not say anything, because I did not want her to think me mean. I am not quite sure that I would like to marry her after that.’

‘What are you going to be, Sholto?’ Eugene asked. The question was suggested by Sholto’s mention of matrimonial engagements.

‘An officer,’ Sholto replied. ‘I want to be in battles and that sort of thing. I should like to be at the head of my men, you know, leading them on to victory.’

‘I should not care for that,’ little Eugene remarked, shaking his head: ‘besides, Sholto, have you money enough to be an officer?’

‘What does an officer want with money?’ Sholto demanded.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ practical little Eugene replied. ‘I hear papa and mamma talk about it sometimes, and they say an officer wants all sorts of things, and has to spend a lot.’

‘Now what can an officer want?’ Sholto argued. ‘Let us see. He wants his sword—and his bed—and he might have a war trumpet, you know—and a chair—and a table.’

‘But suppose you married Ellen?’ suggested Eugene.

‘Then,’ Sholto answered, gravely, ‘we should want another chair.’

This reply seemed so fit and final that little Eugene did not venture to question it, and for a moment the conversation flagged until Sholto took it up again.

‘It is no use, Eugene, your talking about hating girls, because you have got to marry. I heard uncle talking with your father, and

they were saying that some girl they were speaking about would make a capital wife for you. They called her Mildred and they said she would be very rich.'

'I should like her to be rich,' remarked Eugene.

'I should not mind,' Sholto said. 'What has a soldier to do with money? His wife must be ready to go with him, you know; and when they are on campaigns they cannot spend much, even if they try, because there are no shops, you see.'

'But you will not be on campaigns all the time,' Eugene replied, having evidently a more accurate foresight of life than his elder.

'Then,' retorted Sholto, 'the rest of our time we should live in barracks.'

'Sholto,' little Eugene said, after a pause. He did not seem to have noticed the last remark.

‘Yes, Eugene.’

‘Did they say that girl is very rich?’

‘Oh, immensely rich, I heard my uncle say. She has a sister called Violet, and my uncle said, “Poor Violet, none of the money will come to her; all will go to Mildred.” Do you know, Eugene, I felt very sorry for Violet. I wonder what she has done that she is to have no money? I took a dislike to Mildred when I heard it, and I wanted to help Violet.’

‘Perhaps Mildred had nothing to say to it,’ Eugene suggested. ‘I do not see that she is to be blamed, and I do not see what we have to say to helping Violet.’

‘Anyhow, Mildred ought to give up half to Violet,’ Sholto said.

‘Perhaps she will give her some,’ Eugene answered.

Upon this followed a long pause.

‘Sholto,’ Eugene called out.

‘ Yes, Eugene.’

‘ I like Mildred.’

‘ And I like Violet.’

‘ I am getting tired, Sholto.’

‘ So am I. Good night.’

‘ Good night.’

And that very night, while these two little boys lay sleeping, a steam-packet was ploughing its way across the water from France to England. The sea was smooth, except where the prow of the swift ship parted it into dividing waves, which fell back in great rolls of spray that glistened like snow in the full moonlight. The sky was like the water, clear and still. In a little berth of the ladies’ cabin the two small girls, Mildred and Violet, were lying side by side, Violet sleeping, and Mildred wide awake. The little creature sometimes watched the slumbering figures around her ;

sometimes wondered what the occasional footsteps on the deck meant—was it the captain taking care of them all? sometimes she tried, by the dim lamplight, to decipher the carved woodwork on the other side of the cabin; sometimes she shrank back, half in wonder, half in fear, to see through the little round window the white foam go dashing by. Then she looked at Violet sleeping peacefully. Frail and sad was that white face with its long eyelashes and its mass of dark hair. Mildred noticed that her sister's shoulder was uncovered, and softly drew the blanket over it to keep her from the cold. Then she thought of the wide lonely sea, the land they were going back to, the darkness of the night, the strange people that would soon be taking care of them both, and her eyes filled up.

She hid her face in the quilt to stifle

her crying, lest Violet should hear; and she sobbed out the sorrow of her lonely heart,

‘Oh, mamma, mamma.’

CHAPTER V.

MR. JEROME DAWE AT HOME : GARDEN-PARTY.

MR. JEROME DAWE resided in the suburb of Middleborough. His house was a cosy little box, with a window on this side of the door and on that, and three trim windows above, all well painted, well cleaned, and notable for shining brass and fresh white curtains; for, although Jerome Dawe was a miser, this does not imply that he did not live like a gentleman.

The instincts of the Dawes were high-bred, and while Jerome would go a long way to save a sixpence, yet he had his ideas about social requirements, and these he would

carry out. His house was the house of a gentleman, and his dress the same ; his servants were neat and orderly in appearance ; his garden, front and rear, was tidy in winter and blooming in summer. In dinners and suppers, in coals and candles, in a thousand like matters which the social eye sees not, here it was that Jerome Dawe exercised his passion for saving. His favourite maxim was *that every penny should be looked to*, and, after making a due allowance for the manner of life which he judged reasonable, he applied this maxim with merciless severity. By thus living upon one-third of his income, and letting the rest roll up year by year, Jerome Dawe was fast passing from the state of comfort to the state of opulence. What satisfaction this gathering treasure brought with it readers will see as time goes on.

His adviser, comforter, and adjutant in all

his stingy plans was his housekeeper. The name of this excellent female was Martha Spring. She was an unmarried lady, of blameless life and yellow complexion. She clad herself in garments of youthful colour and cut, and wore particularly short skirts, allowing her ankles to be fairly seen, thus imparting a girlishness to her appearance. Her age might be fifty-five or more, but she was juvenile in her tastes as well as in her petticoats, professing to read Sir Walter Scott, and often quoting his lines,

‘O woman, in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,’

which she used to say were truly poetical. Sometimes, after her morning consultation with her master concerning dinner, when the pair would spend a quarter of an hour debating which half of a small codfish would be best for salting, Martha would skip like an ancient lamb out of the room, her nose

raised towards the skies, and a literary vivacity in her expression, as, unconsciously to herself, she repeated,

‘O woman, in our hours of ease.’

Invariably when this happened, Jerome Dawe would sink back in his chair, and say, reflectively,

‘Cultivated woman, Matty—for her station.’

Indeed, the relations between Matty and her bachelor master, though quite innocent, were of an intimate kind; so much so that occasionally one or other of his friends would ask him in a jocular way how Martha was this morning, a familiarity which Jerome never resented, but rather enjoyed. In reply he always assumed a rakish air, and used to say, ‘You see, you dog, I was intended for the army,’ leaving a gulf of suggestion concerning both the military and himself yawning before the inquirer’s mind.

In his pleasant back garden, on a sunny September morning, quite a little party had met together. On the centre of the lawn stood a long wicker wheel-chair, in which lay the frail and sickly Violet, looking sad sweet, and likely enough to fulfil the prediction of Jerome Dawe, which poor Sholto had overheard and misunderstood. A little way off her sister sat apart, playing with a small dog, and calling Sholto to see it jump through her hands. Sholto, very busy making a nosegay, would not look up from his work, although Mildred called him repeatedly. Little Eugene stood close beside her, proffering her many civilities with the best grace in the world, for indeed the little fellow had a charming manner. But Mildred would not repay him, not by a syllable nor a glance.

Sally Badger, with her husband and her son, had just entered the garden. At sight

of her Jerome Dawe was seen to turn pale. Beatrice and Daniel Ruddock, who were already in the field, exchanged looks which signified mistrust and fierce dislike of Sally. As for Samuel Badger, who slunk timidly across the lawn like a beaten dog, and as for Master Badger, whose countenance was rounder and flatter and redder than ever, and who carried a great dog-eared book under his arm—upon these two Mr. and Mrs. Ruddock glared such open and blazing scorn that the father especially felt like a man subjected to rays from burning-glasses. But Sally Badger dealt a defiant salute at the Ruddocks, and then marched up and stood beside Jerome Dawe as if he were a wicket, and she a famous cricketer who had just gone in, and was more than ready for the bowling.

Indeed the situation of the Ruddocks was critical. For years they had regarded Jerome Dawe's wealth as their lawful in-

heritance, and lately they had fixed their covetous eyes on little Mildred. Things looked promising. Jerome was weak, vain, and ignorant. This worthy couple had flattered and caressed him time out of mind; they had fed his every weakness; they had pampered his vanity with outrageous compliments; they had gradually got dominion over him in many directions. And all had been done with words and ways as soft as oil. Lately, however, there had appeared on the scene this terrible cousin, Sarah Badger. She was poor and uninfluential; she had made a bad marriage, and was burdened with an uninteresting son; in a word, she was everything that Daniel and Beatrice Ruddock could successfully ridicule and that Jerome Dawe would naturally despise. But she knew human nature, this Sarah Badger; and she knew Jerome Dawe's nature from the surface to the core. She

had read his weakness and his cowardice, and now she was beginning to assert authority over him simply by the force of will and temper. Horrible to tell, Jerome was beginning to yield in places, like a frozen lake in early thaw. The Ruddocks were appalled. What could they do? It was impossible to begin bullying Jerome like this audacious woman: first, because it would be a reversal of their entire policy, which had been softness and flattery; secondly, because if they had adopted such a line Sally Badger might outwit them by a stroke of generalship, and, becoming soft herself, carry Jerome away for ever. Bitter was the animosity that lay beneath the smile with which the Ruddocks returned Mrs. Badger's salute. Sally's nod had been a perfect missile, delivered with a defiance, a 'do-your-worst' air, which, coming from a woman who probably had not more than

three gowns in the world, and had not paid her butcher's bill for six months, confounded these good people who believed that money alone is power.

So Beatrice and Daniel walked apart in anxiety and even discomfiture; but, as Daniel marked Mildred playing with her dog, his ruling passion overcame him. He forgot Sally Badger and Jerome Dawe and the impending peril.

'See, Beatrice,' he said, indicating the child with a nod of his head, 'one day that girl will be worth two hundred and fifty thousand pounds!'

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH CROSS-PURPOSES CHEQUER CHILDISH
LOVE.

Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds !
Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds,
got by any means whatever—only, *got* !
Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds,
whether in possession, reversion, remainder,
or expectancy ! Oh, miracle of money, two
hundred and fifty thousand pounds !

That tall, slim, chestnut-haired little girl,
as she walked, or stood, or laughed, or
ran, or talked, or was silent, or smiled, or
frowned, was watched, not alone by Daniel
and his wife, but by everybody on that

little lawn. Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds seemed to encircle her head like the aureola of a saint. Her step suggested two hundred and fifty thousand pounds; her voice, her looks, everything she was, and said, and did, in one way or another, expressed—two hundred and fifty thousand pounds !

One exception should be made. The widowed mother of Sholto had just come to fetch her son, having heard of his misdeeds. She now made one of the party. Margaret Alexander was a widow, poorly clad, and with signs of privation and care upon her face, but her aspect was full of independence. Somehow, in that group of money-seekers, she presented, even to the eye, an expressive contrast. There was nothing sly in her look, no side glances, no angry darting of the eyes. She talked freely with everybody, and her conversation was spirit-

ed and her manner easy; for she too was a Dawe, and of gentle nurture. She had no designs on Jerome's wealth, though she was his niece. She had no line baited to catch little Mildred and her quarter-million of gold, though she too had a son to advance in life. Everybody knew that Margaret Alexander was clear of such designs, her reputation for independence and integrity being settled. Curiously enough, each of these plotting people respected her because she was too high-souled to stoop to the meanness which themselves were practising. Daniel Ruddock declared with truth that he enjoyed talking with her. Beatrice treated her with marked consideration. Jerome Dawe was constantly asking her opinion, and deferring to it. Even Sally Badger took her by the arm and walked about with her, with powerful strides, as great cricketers do in pauses of

the game. Indeed, to do doughty Sally justice, she by no means felt the scorn and dislike for Margaret which she so visibly manifested for the Ruddocks. Margaret Alexander was on her own ground. She was a blood relation and no interloper. Sally Badger was indeed ready, if matters went that way, to wage war with Mrs. Alexander; but it would have been honourable war, and Sally would have fought fairly.

For the Ruddocks she had no such feeling. She hated them. There was no weapon she would not have used against them. And, under existing circumstances, the weapon she chose was open defiance, contempt, and dislike, which she took good care should be constantly on the very verge of rudeness, absolute quarrel, and such a complication that either she or the Ruddocks must quit the premises. The

Ruddocks felt all this, as we have seen, and they trembled before her courage: and Sally knew they trembled.

All this time there was one person to whom everybody was kind. Little Violet was petted, caressed, and pitied, as one who is unconsciously passing away from a world whose sweets have never been tasted. And Violet, who had the most loving heart, replied to each endearment with so much sweetness, such bright little smiles of gratitude, and with a tinge of humour too, that even the worldly people around felt touched and had better thoughts as they looked on the wee white face, and thought of certain words about young children, which were spoken by the best Friend children ever had. And Margaret Alexander, who, like all the Dawe family, had religious zeal in her nature, sat down by the child, and, thinking in her good motherly heart that

this frail being could have but a short time here, she spoke to her seriously about 'the better land' where mamma was; and tender little Violet's grey eyes filled with tears, and she asked the lady to come another day and talk to her about mamma.

Mildred who, hard and arid to others, was passionately fond of Violet, had stood close by during this little conversation, listening with wide big eyes; and she stole softly after Mrs. Alexander, and slipped a flower into her hand and ran away, leaving the widow in wonder. For already Mildred had impressed everybody with a sense of her independence, of her imperiousness, and her wilfulness. She had snubbed Daniel Ruddock, who had tried, in his vulgar way, to caress her. She had flatly refused to do something which Sally Badger had asked her, which astounded Sally more than if the law of gravitation had been suspended.

Two minutes after, Mildred had sent Jerome Dawe to fetch her maid. All she did, however, was submitted to without a murmur, because of the two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. But when she was seen stealing across the lawn, and putting this flower into Mrs. Alexander's hand, everybody wondered, and everybody feared; and yet nobody thought of charging the widow with any design on the little heiress.

Side by side with this manœuvring of the elders, a curious game of cross-purposes was being played by the children.

Little Eugene had caught the spirit of his father and mother and patron. The two hundred and fifty thousand pounds magnetised him like the rest. He danced in his graceful way after Mildred, paid her a thousand pretty little compliments, anticipated her wishes, and was in all points as

natty a flatterer as a grown man. But it availed nothing. Mildred treated him with haughty disregard, and, indeed, snubbed him mercilessly. Everyone except Mrs. Alexander noticed that wherever that ill-conditioned Sholto might be, looking like a ragged terrier, there Mildred was sure to be seen; and that if she snubbed Eugene, Sholto amply avenged his friend by snubbing her.

He was still busy at his nosegay, tying it up, taking it to pieces, and rearranging it with endless pains. Mildred hovered about him. She showed the greatest interest in the nosegay. She even went so far as to suggest that one particular rose should be placed in the centre, not at the side.

‘There is where *I* should like it,’ she said.

‘Very well, ’blunt Sholto retorted; ‘there are lots of flowers, make a nose-

gay for yourself, and put roses where you please.'

'I wonder whom it is for?' Mildred said, daringly. She was a daring girl, and part of her story will show it.

'You wonder who it is for?' Sholto said, looking up, with a laugh, 'just wait and see.'

'I think I know now,' Mildred answered, apparently much gratified by some inference of her own. She skipped across the grass, and for the first time that day seemed to be pleasant with little Eugene; but she cast her eye back at Sholto as if computing how soon the nosegay would be finished.

It was set in order, and tied with a piece of stout packing-thread; the thread was cut with a knife the size of a gardener's; the nosegay was ready for delivery. Sholto leaped on his feet.

Mildred had been talking to little Eugene, but her eyes were on the nosegay all the time, and she saw the last touch given to it. Eugene wondered why she looked about her in so strange a manner; he could not make her listen.

Presently Sholto came across the lawn.

‘What do you say to *that*?’ he cried to Mildred, holding up the nosegay. ‘Pretty, now, ain’t it?’

‘Lovely! lovely!’ she replied. ‘Oh, thank you, thank you.’

‘’Tisn’t for you,’ Sholto called out, scornfully. ‘Did you think it was for you? I was not making it for you.’ He repeated this ‘for you’ in a very injurious way. ‘This is for Violet.’

And he ran across to the sick child, and tossed the nosegay upon her coverlet, and little Violet took it up with the brightest and sweetest smile Sholto had ever seen

anywhere. The child was really pleased with the act of kindness ; and such was the look of pleasure and gratitude she beamed at Sholto that he turned quite red, and found that he had an organ in his breast which was capable of a sensation altogether new to him, but very delightful.

Meanwhile, Mildred proudly walked off in another direction, and stood with her back to all the company, doing nothing at all, but fixed like a statue. Such a proceeding on the part of a young lady who, in all probability, would one day be worth two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, was by no means likely to pass unnoticed in a well-bred company. The result of Mildred's odd and alarming behaviour caused so sudden and general a movement that the next minute all the people on the lawn were exclaiming to each other, in a momentary fellowship, that the heiress was crying !

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH GIVES A PICTURE OF A SHABBY-GENTEEL
WOMAN STRUGGLING WITH GOOD SOCIETY.

THE relations of Sally Badger with the great Dawe family ought now to be delineated. Sally was the daughter of our great Jerome's younger sister. This Susan Dawe married a captain in the navy, who died at the age of fifty-five, and left his large family in poverty. When Sally came to woman's estate she saw that her chances of matrimony were of the most precarious and spiritless kind. She was not handsome, she was not accomplished, she was not rich. True, under such circumstances, ten thou-

sand women have worked their way on to brilliant marriages ; but such women have easy temper, complaisance, and address. Sally had none of those things. Defiance was wrought into her soul of souls. She loved command. Not to have won the heart of a prince could she have fawned, or sweetened her talk with compliments, or affected compliance where she did not feel it. And Sally knew of what material she was made. So, counting up her defects of face, fortune, and temper, one day, when she was touching the age of twenty-eight, she said to herself, ‘Sarah Dampier, you will die without changing your name.’ She pronounced this with the most dogmatic air, all alone as she was. Then, like other dogmatists, whose way is sometimes to annex a note of qualification to their utterances, she added, ‘Unless—’ Here she paused again, and, drawing herself up to her full

height, regarded with sternness the image in her poor looking-glass, and questioned it:

‘Unless what, Sarah Dampier?’

And Sarah Dampier the actual answered Sarah Dampier the optical, in tones of mathematical conviction,

‘Unless you marry Samuel Badger.’

Samuel Badger was a clerk in a Government office, earning something like two hundred a year. He admired Sally. He was a meek young man, too fat for his age, of fair family, and spotless reputation. Sally Dampier’s calculation was that, if she married him, the Dawe family (who would never help her in a pecuniary way) might, by their influence, advance her Samuel in the public service. Acting upon this hope, Sarah Dampier changed her name to Sarah Badger just three months later.

Then began one of those lives of penury where the struggle for gentility on scanty

means makes comfort hopeless. The income of the Badgers was not quite two hundred a year, and it never increased. Had Sally Badger been able or willing to forget that she was a lady born, or could she have repressed her ambition, she might have been domestically comfortable. I believe there is no more terrible tyranny on earth than that social requirement which insists that folks such as the Badgers shall wear the face of gentility. This is just what makes their whole life one long bitter fight. For house and food and raiment they have sufficient; but when it comes to keeping a drawing-room, and genteel clothing, and higher education of their children, why, I believe only God, who surely hears the groans of these prisoners of fashion, knows what misery ensues.

The struggle to give the sons a professional education, and to keep the daughters on

such a footing that they may hope to marry respectably—in how many small houses in England to-day is that fight maintained by parents whose meagre lives, as we survey them, seem utterly unheroic! Oh, world, who knowest not thy heroes! I believe that the soldier, with his wild leap into the smoking breach, where sure death is grinning at him, or the captain calmly standing on the sinking ship watching till the last man and woman are safe in the boats, then going bravely down, make not such martyrs to duty and idea as these shabby, uninteresting people do for years of dreary life.

Here was Sally Badger, stationed in a small tenement, with a little drawing-room on one side of the door, and behind that a little dining-room, in the rear a kitchen and scullery which ran out into the back-garden, and three or four bed-rooms overhead.

Sally Badger ! She who had a share in the traditions of the Dawes ; who had sometimes been a visitor at the house of the great head of the family ; who had sat down at table with lords and earls ; and who would often tell her wondering son that once upon a time the Duke of Berkshire had helped her to marmalade at breakfast.

These grand traditions ruled the life of Sally, and the little entrance-hall was kept bright from year to year, and the little drawing-room smart in summer and warm in winter, perhaps from a kind of idea that the Duke of Berkshire might one day remember the episode of the marmalade and drop in to call. If he did, Sally resolved that, even in her little house, there should be visible signs that hers was no vulgarian's poverty. His Grace never called, but Sally had now and then a blue-blooded visitor to

encourage her. The Dawes had one curious trait, that they never snubbed poor branches of the family. Of course Sally Badger was not asked to dinners, nor to pay long visits; but the Dawe blood in her was recognised by an occasional call or letter, and these were cordials for the woman in her life of struggle.

Her husband tired her. Do what she would, Sally could not drive ambition into him. His living was not expensive, for he was fond of bread-and-butter and would eat it three times a day, and he never drank anything but water, and certainly made his clothes last wonderfully. Still Sally would have preferred an extravagant man, or an intemperate man, who had movement and ambition, to this bread-and-butter Samuel, who smiled for ever, and could not be put in a passion. His disposition was ruinously contented and easy-going. Even when a post

in the office fell vacant slightly superior to his own, he was not a candidate for the promotion, but let another man be run into the situation over his head.

‘Samuel,’ Sally called out in agony, when she heard it, ‘why did you not apply?’

‘You see, my dear,’ he answered, ‘Martin is such a passionate man that if he had missed the post there never would have been peace in the office again; and it is only twenty pounds a year more, my love, and blessed are the peacemakers, you know, Sally.’

‘Blessed are the milksops!’ Sally cried out, in great vexation. She was not a profane person, but, in truth, she would not acknowledge the propriety of her husband’s quotation. ‘You are no peacemaker, Samuel. If peace were really wanted, you would not manage it. Oh, Samuel! twenty pounds would have nearly paid our house-

rent, and I am worn to death slaving and pinching. Peacemaker, indeed. You are no peacemaker.'

'Well, perhaps I am not, dear,' Samuel replied, as he buttered his bread. 'I will not say I am.'

As another sample of the home conversation of this pair, and as a fresh glimpse of their characters, I set down a few words which they exchanged when—five years after marriage—Sally presented her lord with a diminutive Badger.

'I want to choose a name for him,' she said, looking at the little sleeper who lay beside her. 'I wish,' she sighed, and her face was full of foreboding—'I wish he was not such a quiet infant. He never screams and always seems satisfied.'

Mrs. Badger gazed up at her husband's sleek face, and sighed again, as she said,

‘I am really afraid, Sammy—I really *am* afraid—he has got your nose.’

Mr. Badger rubbed that feature, as if reproaching it for being what it was, but he judged that silence was his best policy. His wife ruminated awhile, and said again, as much to herself as to him,

‘What shall we call him?’

‘Suppose we try Samuel, for an experiment,’ the father said, shyly.

‘I hate the name!’ exclaimed Sally, vehemently. ‘You must think of another.’

‘Now, do you know,’ remarked Mr. Badger, not speaking to his wife in particular, but, as it seemed, addressing the general order of things, ‘it is most extraordinary that just at this particular moment all the Christian names seem to have gone out of my head. How very singular! The only name I can think of is “Tobias.” Would Tobias do, my love?’

‘Samuel!’ exclaimed Mrs. Badger, in a loud voice; ‘you will make me scream. Tobias! Tobias Badger! It would be like a name in a play.’

‘Then, do you know, my dear,’ said Samuel, with the air of one who all of a sudden makes a discovery, ‘I think the best way will be for you to think the matter over quietly—alone. Something may come into your head, my love, when you least expect it.’

‘What I want,’ continued Mrs. Badger, in the same audible soliloquy, ‘is a name with force in it. A name that will make a boy think about being something and somebody. Such a name as would suggest a man who can get into a passion, and contradict, and push other people aside, and lead the way and fight for his own!’

‘Don’t you think you had better have several names, my love?’ suggested the

father. 'It would be rather much to expect all that out of one. We should never be unreasonable, Sally, my dear!'

'I have it!' cried Sally, triumphantly; 'I have the very name I want—Hector!'

'Hector was a pagan, my love!'

'What of that?' retorted Sally, boldly; 'better be a pagan than a fool!'

So Hector was the chosen name; and thus the names of the family into which our little Golden Girls entered, were Samuel, Sarah, and Hector Badger.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH ENDS IN GENERAL LAUGHTER.

A FEW days after the scene in the garden, the modest mansion of Sally Badger was signalized among the neighbouring houses by the unusual spectacle of a carriage and pair standing before it. Out of the carriage stepped little Mildred, and she, turning round to the servant who was with them, said, with an air of authority,

‘Lift Miss Violet gently.’

And so little sick Violet was lifted out in the maid’s arms. Her white face looked very lovely, for the air had painted upon it a most delicate vermilion, which lit all its

melancholy grace into particular beauty, like one streak of sunset in a pensive western sky. There was expectation in the child's face; she wanted to see her new home.

Meanwhile, Mildred, with imperial steps, walked up the little flagged way that led to the front door, and at the entrance Sally Badger stood ready to greet her, smiling with wondrous complaisance.

‘How are you, my dear?’

‘Pretty well,’ Mildred replied, curtly.

‘Is this the house you live in?’

‘Yes, dear—at present.’

‘Why, it is just the size of the house where papa's gardener lived,’ Mildred remarked. ‘Not quite so good, I think.’

‘We are going to a much larger house very soon,’ Mrs. Badger said; ‘in about three weeks, dear.’

‘But you have lived here until now,’

Mildred rejoined, fixing her searching eyes on Sally. 'Is it because Violet and I have come that you are going to a nicer house?'

Sally Badger affected to be busy with the trunks, and made no answer, but she took note of this shrewd question.

'I tell you what, miss,' Sally said, under her breath, 'you are not a simpleton. You will need managing.'

'Oh, what a dear little house!' cried Violet, who came up just then. 'Look, Mildred, at those pansies, and that little white pussy. I think this is a dear little house. May I play with the pussy?' she asked, addressing Mrs. Badger.

'Pansies or pussies, or whatever you like, darling,' cried Sally, quite delighted with the child. 'You shall play with anything and everything.'

'Are you going to take care of us?' the little creature asked, curiously, struck with a

new thought. 'Will you be kind to us? Do you know mamma has gone to heaven, and left us?'

'I will be kind to you, dear,' Sally Badger replied, with great energy, bending down to kiss the child. 'Who could be anything else?' she murmured to herself, marking the white transparent cheeks and the thin hands and the little porcelain teeth which seemed to indicate a frail and perishing frame. 'You shall not shed many tears under this roof, and what you shed I shall wipe off.'

The little girls were soon led up to their bedroom, where Mildred, after her fashion, found fault with most things, and Violet, in her way, was constantly coming upon what was pleasant or whimsical or funny. Mildred's severity gave way before Violet's simple delight, and once or twice she even broke into a little laugh. For Mildred,

amidst all her austerity, seemed to consider Violet before herself, and to regard things as pleasant or the reverse according as she judged them agreeable or disagreeable to her little sister.

Down into the small dining-room the two children were brought after a time, Violet holding her nurse's hand to support her feeble steps, and Mildred walking in with her erect figure and Diana step, and curious, searching, yet unconcerned gaze.

Here sat Hector, poring over a book, and looking sheepish and uncomfortable, when the strangers entered.

'Reading again, Hector!' exclaimed his mother impatiently. 'Always reading! What good will ever come of that, I wonder? Do either go on one side or the other! Now, Mildred, this way.'

Mr. Badger was in the room also, waiting

for his dinner. He rose and greeted the children.

‘How do you do, my dears? How are both of you? You look very good little people, I am sure.’

‘Samuel,’ said Mrs. Badger, decisively, ‘that will do.’

So they sat down to dinner, and the first dish was a beefsteak pudding served in a sort of white basin, and certainly not appetising to the eye. Mildred regarded the dish with an open stare which was immensely expressive. Little Violet broke into a laugh full of music and fun, but strange by contrast with her delicate suffering face. She clapped her hands; and her sweet grey eyes filled with the pleasantest mirth.

‘Look, Milly, just look, what a funny thing! Oh, I want some of that; when my turn comes, I mean.’

Shocked at her own boisterousness, she

dropped her outspread hands under the cloth, and put on such a Quaker face that even Master Hector, whose round visage seemed for the most part as incapable of expression as a pasteboard face in a pantomime, was moved to irrepressible admiration. As to Sally Badger's countenance, which turned in delight upon the child, it was like the shining sun.

'Have some, dear,' Mrs. Badger said to Mildred, as she sent her knife into the pudding, from which the rich brown gravy poured.

'Well,' replied Mildred, 'a very, *very* little, please.'

'I assure you, my dear,' said Mr. Badger, addressing Mildred at this point, 'you will find it very good eating; especially the gravy. Do you know, my dear, I am very fond of gravy, and have been since I was your age.'

Mildred set her eyes upon him, but spoke not a word.

‘Samuel,’ his wife said, emphatically, ‘have I not said that will do?’

The meal proceeded. Mildred toyed with her portion very like a high-bred child, but with suppressed discontent in every feature. Violet ate away quite heartily, and the only time Mildred looked pleased was when her sister asked for some more.

‘I am so hungry,’ she cried; ‘it is so nice.’

‘I am quite glad to hear you say so,’ remarked the irrepressible Mr. Badger, looking up from his plate. ‘It is an excellent dish, and especially the gravy, as I said before. Gravy,’ continued Mr. Badger, warming with his subject, and addressing Violet as a hopeful disciple, ‘is such a help with the bread. There it is you will find it useful. I assure you, my dear, if you

cultivate a liking for gravy you will never regret it. As you go through life, you will find gravy a wonderful help; one of your best friends, in fact.'

It was a sign of the subordinate place which Samuel Badger occupied in his own house that he invariably sat at the side of his table, near to his wife. Now, it may surprise the reader that he should have been allowed to ramble on for so long a time unrebuked. The fact was his wife, who did not like to be perpetually reproving him before the children, especially the first day, had tried to reduce him to silence by nudging him suggestively under the table with her foot. Unfortunately, she had mistaken the leg of the table for that of her husband, so that her nudges produced no impression, and, her temper being roused by his insensibility, she at last delivered an honest kick, as she supposed, into her husband's shin.

The wood of the table being a substance not so yielding as Mr. Badger's flesh, and Sally having an irritable and ill-protected corn, she inflicted on herself at that moment a blow she never forgot. In her anguish she uttered an ejaculation, which was delivered so heartily that everybody looked up.

‘What is the matter, my dear?’ her husband asked, perceiving by something in her actions that the cause of her disquiet was under the table. ‘Is that troublesome cat there again?’

‘Samuel!’ his wife ejaculated, and no more. But she cast this verbal javelin with such an eye of fire that her husband did not speak again for a long time.

‘What a funny spoon!’ cried Violet again, when pudding time came. The spoon was German silver, and yellow with service. ‘I never saw a spoon like this before.’

‘Never mind, dear,’ replied Mrs. Badger; ‘things will be very different to-morrow. Everything will be different to-morrow. New knives are coming, and forks and spoons, and I don’t know what beside.’

Just at this moment the pudding was set upon the table. It was a long pudding, and, like the rest of the entertainment, not overtempting to a fastidious person. But both Samuel Badger and his round-faced son regarded it with evident interest, as a luxury, and to them a toothsome morsel.

‘Now, Violet,’ said Mrs. Badger, wielding her knife, ‘have some of this pudding, my dear.’

‘What sort of pudding is it?’ the child asked.

‘We call it “dog in a blanket,”’ replied Mrs. Badger, gravely.

She had not calculated upon the effect of this surname upon her little guest. Mildred

maintained her usual air of aloofness, just touched with disdain; but little Violet, tickled by the idea in the words, broke into a hearty laugh.

‘Milly! Milly!’ she cried, almost faintly from her excessive mirth, ‘dog in a blanket, Milly! Look at it!’

Off the little delicate creature went in miniature peals of laughter, with such a note of humour in every silvery round that the contagion was irresistible. It was plain that this sickly child had an acute sense of fun. The rest had to confess her power. First Master Hector, after ineffectually trying to quench his laughter by the ingenious method of thrusting a large German-silver spoon into his mouth, let his merriment have free way. Then Samuel Badger, after a moment’s hesitation, spent in glancing at his wife, followed by a series of long buttery laughs, drawn in with one

breath and sent out with the other, like the bray of a donkey, a performance which redoubled little Violet's merriment. Mildred, after pulling Violet's skirt softly as a hint not to be so demonstrative, caught the infection also, and began to laugh for herself. Finally Sally, surveying this laughing quartette, set her knife and spoon down, and closed the procession with a peal of her own, which certainly was not the least hearty. Many a year had the Badgers lived in that little house, and many a meal had they eaten in that little dining-room, but such a sound of mirth the walls had never echoed as on this day, when frail, sickly Violet Walsingham led the laughter.

CHAPTER IX.

POSSIBLE LEGATEES IN THREE POSTURES : GREEDINESS, ANXIETY, AND NOBLE REPOSE.

It may be thought a bad way, but in telling a story my custom is, instead of occupying the early chapters with a long preliminary account of the place in which the action lies, and the antecedents of leading characters, to introduce both to my readers bit by bit as occasion requires. Surely it is in this way, reader, that real life makes us acquainted with towns and houses, and men and women. Little by little, through days, or weeks, or years.

Accordingly, I think it quite time enough

to tell you now that the present action of this story lies in the suburban part of that pleasant town of Middleborough. In ten minutes, with moderately fast walking, you could put a girdle round the houses in which Jerome Dawe, Sally Badger, Mrs. Alexander, and the Ruddocks severally resided. These people all knew each other, and were all upon speaking terms with each other, dealt at the same shops, attended the same church, and talked the same talk day by day. They also called each other by their Christian names, being everyone related more or less closely; for Beatrice Ruddock had a remote connection with the Dawes; and in virtue of his wife's affinity Daniel too was admitted to the honour of this familiar appellation. So when these people met the talk was full of 'Daniel,' and 'Sally,' and 'Margaret,' and 'Jerome,' and 'Beatrice,' giving a friendly air to the inter-

course. Alas ! there was much plotting underneath. For this, it must in truth be said, the Ruddocks were to blame, They, who of the coterie were the most remotely connected with Jerome Dawe, had long marked his fortune for their own. Until lately they had resided in the country, and used to have Jerome staying with them for long visits, by which device they secured opportunities of gaining influence over him.

Proud Margaret Alexander, poor as she was, never even resented Jerome's open preference for these designing people, whose mean arts she scornfully deciphered from the first. She treated him with the same half-daughterly affection which she had always shown to him.

Not so Sally Badger. Sally repeatedly remonstrated with Margaret, clenching her fist, and declaring that if she could get at those Ruddocks she would soon make them

know their place. But the Ruddocks lived far off, and Sally had little power over them, until the schemers, affecting weariness of rural life, but in reality fearful of Sally's possible counter plots, resolved to take a house in Middleborough, close to Jerome Dawe. By this means they hoped to bring Jerome entirely under their influence. They did not perceive that this new policy must give Sally many openings for warfare. The first intimation of the mistake they had made came when Sally, by sheer stress of determination, swept Mildred and Violet out of their hands. Daniel and Beatrice turned green with vexation that day, and in their hearts cursed Jerome Dawe for a pliant fool, forgetting that were he not a pliant fool they could have no power over him. But Daniel, after sitting for two hours in his contemplative posture, with his shoulders up about his ears, said to his wife,

‘The whole question lies in a nutshell, Bee. Are we, or Sally, best able to manage Jerome?’

‘We,’ answered Beatrice, with a laugh full of self-reliance.

‘I am not quite sure of that,’ Daniel replied. ‘Sally is a tigress. And it is never wise to be too sure when you are dealing with a tigress.’

‘We shall have our way at last,’ said his wife, so safe in her grand conclusion that she disdained argument in detail.

‘I hope we may. We must be civil to Sally.’

‘Civil to Sally, Daniel! Of course we must. That is what cuts her. That is what will defeat her. Civil! I should think so!’

Beatrice laughed maliciously, and Daniel, looking up at her gravely at first, caught her mood, and took his part in the laughter

as if it were a concerted piece of music.

Their hope was that they might so provoke Sally, that she, in her rage and fury, might rush into some desperate position, and declare war upon them, they, of course, maintaining a pacific aspect. To effect this with more apparent sincerity, they must never be ruffled by Sally's rudeness; in fact, they bore her outbursts with a Christian meekness, which Jerome Dawe did not fail to mark. All was done that when they struck they might strike indeed. As yet, however, they had made no way. Sally had a formidable ally in Margaret Alexander. Jerome really respected this niece, and wondered that she, poor and a widow, should yet so nobly disdain the money which was his god. Jerome had a strong tincture of religion in his constitution—superstition might be a fitter word—and Margaret Alexander was really pious. The up-shot

was that, so far as legitimate and honest influence went, no one had such power over Jerome Dawe as Margaret Alexander. And Margaret liked Sally. She deplored her cousin's eagerness for earthly things, but her honesty she admired ; so that, as often as Jerome mentioned Sally's name, Margaret said something handsome, and these few tributes were just sufficient with a weak man like Jerome to frustrate the efforts of the Ruddocks, who worked night and day to edge Sally altogether out of his favour.

Let justice now be done to Sally Badger. She had the money-hunger of a poor and struggling housekeeper, unchecked by the finer sentiments of her cousin. Still, there was no wish on her part to take an unfair advantage of Margaret. Had Jerome's wealth been prospectively divided in equal parts between herself and Margaret, she would have been perfectly satisfied. But

Margaret absolutely refused to lift a finger in the matter, though she had to pinch hard to keep herself and her boy respectably, and so Sally was forced, in the language of the whist-table, to play for her own hand.

‘All I can say is, Margaret,’ Sally remarked one day, ‘if you are going with your fine scruples to let this money slip away I am not, at least not without a fight for it. Oh, Margaret! if those Ruddocks get uncle’s property, I shall die. I shall die, Margaret!’

‘Live for something that won’t disappoint you, Sally,’ replied her grave cousin, who that very morning had been compelled to give up the dress she had hoped to buy because Sholto’s education was becoming so expensive. ‘Choose the better part, Sally. Choose the one thing needful, Sally.’

‘The one thing needful for me,’ replied Sally, unconsciously anticipating a modern

witticism, 'is ready cash. We are in great straits this quarter.'

'So am I—often,' replied Margaret.

'And what is your way out of the fix?' asked Sally, a little sullenly.

She could tell what Margaret's answer would be.

'I trust God,' the other answered, with simple cheerfulness. 'And I am not going to soil my fingers by trying to grasp uncle's money;' which the brave woman said with an air of lofty purpose, that showed how the blood of that original rascal Dawe had been fined by time and transmission.

'Margaret,' Sally retorted, getting a little brighter in prospect of her joke, but still with a grim smile, 'if there was nothing except money to soil my fingers, I should not have to wash my hands very often!'

CHAPTER X.

A CURIOUS VIEW OF MUTUAL SOCIETY, HELP, AND
COMFORT.

THE Ruddocks, as we have said, lived not very far from the humble tenement which at present housed the Badger family. Our action now flits to the dining-room of this mansion, where were seated after breakfast Beatrice and her lord. Daniel Ruddock sat at the table with his open desk before him, and his warped figure and high shoulders gave him a remarkable and almost deformed appearance. He was busy at his accounts, and although the morning was warm he was wrapped in a great shawl, which by no means lessened the oddity of

his aspect. It was a pinched face and a forbidding, which, with a curious, tense look upon it, pored over the figures; and the dry, thin lips moved in inaudible calculations, as his pen travelled slowly down the column. Beatrice reclined in an easy-chair. Her attitude was careless, even inelegant, as if posturing were not worth thinking of now; yet she looked a handsome matron, and, when contrasted with her husband, the wonder arose how she could ever have linked her comely self to so meagre a creature. But there they were; and to do Beatrice and Daniel justice, they maintained the matrimonial relation in greater harmony than many better people can. They had the great bond of union in their tastes. Daniel was not only fond of his wife, but respected her too, and, after his kind, he was affectionate with his son and daughter. His

master-passion was love of money. Beatrice was as fond of money as he; she loved her son; and her pride—disappointed in Daniel—was now awaiting in a mood of deferred expectation for the time when little Eugene—and perhaps the daughter Lucy—would make a figure in society. Daniel loved money for money's sake; Beatrice loved it for the sake of the position it gave, and most of all for the sake of little Eugene, whom the ambitious mother hoped might one day be a peer, and she alive to see it. The peerage ran in the heads of all the Dawes, even in the remote collateral branches.

As Daniel was just carrying 'one,' 'ought,' 'nine,' which for some reason he pronounced aloud, he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which shook his paltry frame as a strong wind shakes a vile shanty. He threw himself back, exhausted with the effort, and panted for breath.

‘I am a poor sickly devil!’ he said, as soon as he could speak. And then, repeating the words more easily and deliberately, ‘A—poor—sickly—devil.’

Beatrice looked at him with an expression of anxiety, and Daniel, with his keen eyes, caught the look, and changed colour.

‘What does the doctor say of me, Bee?’ he asked. ‘Tell me, without any reserve, what *does* the doctor say?’

‘He says you must be careful,’ Beatrice answered, with hesitation; ‘very careful in the winter.’

Another onset of coughing racked his frame, and for several minutes he could not speak.

‘I doubt if any care will keep me here long,’ he said. ‘However—business—business!’

And he bent over his accounts again.

‘I have been thinking, Bee,’ he said, look-

ing up as he sank back in his chair, and putting the feather of his pen to his lip, 'I shall reduce Gaby's wages eightpence a week.'

'Do you think so, Daniel?' she remarked.
'He keeps the garden very neat.'

'He will keep the garden as neat on fourteen and four as on fifteen,' replied Daniel.

'His wife had another child last week,' she remarked.

'My dear, if I were to give eightpence a week to every labouring man whose wife had another child last week, I should have to pay a pretty penny. Why did his wife have another child? I should have thought four enough. It is a curious thing,' Daniel said, playing more actively with the feather, as if to stimulate his mind, 'gardeners always do go on having children. I suppose because Adam was told to multiply, and

they think they have succeeded to the business.'

He sniggered over his joke, at which Beatrice smiled complaisantly. Then she said,

'Eightpence a week is scarcely worth mentioning.'

Daniel rose up in his chair, his face all on the alert, and his expression that of a man who has got an opening for a favourite argument.

'Eightpence a week not much!' he cried. 'Let me show you what eightpence a week is. It is one pound fourteen shillings and eightpence each year. That is not much, you say. There we don't quite agree, but pass that by. In forty years, what will eightpence a week amount to?' He had the figures ready, for out the sum came without any computation. 'It will amount to sixty-nine pounds six shillings and ten-

pence. There is more than that. Keep investing your few pounds from time to time as they roll up—investing judiciously—and, at the end of the forty years, you may have not sixty-six, but one hundred pounds saved!’

‘One hundred pounds saved after forty years, Daniel!’ Beatrice said, shaking her head. ‘It is not much, after all.’

‘Yes! yes! yes!’ cried Daniel, eagerly, ‘but go on saving eightpences! Save ten a week; one in coals, one in candles, one in note-paper and envelopes, one in the kitchen, one in the dining-room, and so forth. In forty years your saved eightpences alone will amount to one thousand pounds! One thousand pounds, Bee. That is the way fortunes are made. That is the way money rolls up. Look at me. I am only fifty to-day. I may live to be ninety. Many people do. And at ninety, there would be my

thousand pounds, made up of saved eightpences. How a man would feel in his old age, to see one thousand pounds in gold lying on the table before him, and he able to say to it, "There you lie, great heap of shining gold; hundreds would risk their necks to get you off that table. You would start a man in life well. For the sake of you, ten thousand men in England to-day would lie, swear, steal, cheat, forge, risk their lives by sea or land, in fair ways or foul; but you are mine, mine, mine, without wrong or danger—one thousand pounds in shining gold."

The sick man grew quite eloquent, struck his hands together, and a flush stole out upon his pallid cheek as he depicted this triumph. Then, sinking back once more in his chair, he feebly said,

'Yes, I shall reduce Gaby eightpence a week.'

A little pause followed upon this instructive dialogue, and Daniel, looking up at his handsome wife, began a new subject.

‘Sally has played us a fine trick about those girls.’

‘Odious woman!’ Beatrice remarked, with a most honest expression of dislike. ‘How can she have any good blood in her!’

‘Come! come!’ Daniel cried, interrupting her. The subject of good blood he would never listen to, except under compulsion. ‘There is nothing to be got by calling Sally names. She plays her game. We must play ours, Bee.’

‘What is our game to be?’ Beatrice asked, sulkily.

‘I am going to tell you,’ Daniel replied, glancing round to see if the door was shut. ‘I have my plan for getting those girls out of her clutches and into our hands. It is a

plan that cannot fail. With decent caution, it cannot fail.'

'What *can* it be?' Beatrice asked, greatly interested, and knowing that her crafty husband would not speak in this way without good reason. 'Oh, I shall be glad to outwit her!'

'Come here,' Daniel said, 'and sit beside me.'

Beatrice went to his side, and, seating herself on a footstool, threw her hands carelessly about him; and he, pleased with the attention of his handsome wife, caressed her affectionately, and for a few moments his thoughts ran in another direction. Then, all at once, his face puckered up into the most plotting look. A wicked expression stole out on his features just as a look of suffering might appear on one suddenly smitten with an acute pang.

Full of the matter, he bent low down

and was beginning thus : ‘ I can tell you the whole plan, from beginning to end, in five minutes,’ when, as if to warn him that other circumstances were at work in human affairs than he was taking into account, the maid tapped at the door, and, throwing it open, announced,

‘ Major Sanctuary, if you please, sir.’

CHAPTER XI.

‘MAJOR SANCTUARY, THE QUIDNUNCS CLUB,
199a, PICCADILLY.

MAJOR SANCTUARY entered. He was a tall man, with hair rapidly turning from iron-grey to white. His face was thin, perhaps with meagre living, or possibly from leanness of constitution. He wore a frock-coat buttoned tightly round his thin frame, and his whole attire, cravat, linen, and boots, while marked by the most scrupulous neatness, set forth either extreme stinginess or genteel poverty. His voice was loud, even blustering, and there was a kind of Pistol swagger about him which contrasted strangely with his thread-bare coat, and

yet more strangely with an air of good breeding which no eccentricity of dress and manner could quite efface.

‘How d’ye do, Ruddock?’ he called out, catching that gentleman’s eye first. ‘Mrs. Ruddock, I am delighted to see you looking so well—so charming—this disagreeable weather.’

Saying this, Major Sanctuary leaned on his cane and surveyed his friends with a rigidity and erectness of posture which might have done credit to a monument.

‘Very pleased to see you, Major,’ Daniel called out, with a face which threw doubt upon the assertion. ‘Where will you sit? Not sit at all! Just so. But dear me, Major, I am afraid I can’t quite return your compliment to Mrs. Ruddock as to healthy looks.’

Daniel was very fond of talking about health.

'*You* don't look quite the thing. A little yellow. Liver, eh?'

'No, no, no,' the Major answered, with great spirit: 'nothing of the kind, Ruddock—nothing of the kind. It's the Quidnuncs, sir.'

'The *what*?' Beatrice asked, wondering.

'The Quidnuncs, ma'am,' the Major replied, revolving on his axis to address Mrs. Ruddock with greater ease, but still keeping his monumental attitude. 'The Quidnuncs is my new club, 199A, Piccadilly, and a very pretty situation too!'

'*Another* club, Major!' Beatrice exclaimed.

'Yes, ma'am, another club,' the Major answered, rapping with his right hand on the table. 'And the best of all, I assure you. Small. Tidy. Well-ventilated. Good company. And special privileges.'

The Major delivered these statements separately, and in jerks, giving one the idea of a man reading down a column.

‘This makes twenty-one clubs, does it not, Major?’ Beatrice inquired, more, it seemed, for something to say, than from curiosity.

‘Twenty-one, ma’am, exactly,’ Major Sanctuary answered. ‘Reminding one of the old adage, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again.” I have been trying London clubs for years, ma’am, spending a mint of money, and always getting disappointed. But I went on at it, and I have found what I want at last. The great feature about the Quidnuncs is, that members can introduce lady friends to have a bit o’ lunch. A great convenience to a dog of a bachelor like me, who knows half the town, and is invited by half the town, but who, living in lodg-

ings, is not able to return civilities under a roof of his own.'

'So you entertain ladies at your club?' Beatrice remarked, in the listless way in which, for politeness, people keep up an uninteresting conversation. 'How very pleasant!'

She smiled.

'Remember, ma'am,' the Major continued, with severity, noticing her ironical look, 'they must *be* ladies. Nobody questionable, and nobody of inferior social position. Oh dear, no, not for a moment! Let me give you an illustration. There is my friend Thistle, a very well-meaning man, but not altogether as sharp as an attorney-at-law. Some weeks ago Thistle asked two lady friends to lunch with him. It came out—or people thought it came out—that on the reputation of one of these ladies there was a speck. Now, Mrs. Ruddock, don't frown.

I assure you, ma'am, it was not even alleged to be more than a speck. I should forfeit my life if it was more than a speck. Very well. The lunch passed off. Next morning our secretary, Jones, meets Thistle in the entrance-hall, which, by the way, is marble, ma'am, and as slippery as ice, as I shall show you by another pleasant anecdote another day. Jones is an out-spoken man, who takes his bull by the horns.

““Sir,” says Jones, addressing Thistle, “can you give me the name of the lady who lunched with you yesterday?”

““Certainly,” replies Thistle.

““How did you make her acquaintance, sir?” asks Jones.

““Sir,” Thistle answers, “she was once very kind to my wife’s mother.”

““All I can say is, sir,” replies Jones, “she has been very unkind to your wife’s mother’s son-in-law.” (Jones has that way

of tossing your words up in the air like a juggler, and catching them in another shape as they come down.)

“What do you mean, sir?” asks Thistle.

“Simply this, sir,” Jones answers, “that you will be scratched off the list of this club in about as short a time as it takes to dip the pen in the ink and take it out again!”

Major Sanctuary paused here and left a blank in his narrative. Then he resumed :

‘Thistle is a timid man, and would not face the affair. And as sure as I am standing here, alive, before you, this morning, ma’am’—the Major said this with another little axial movement to settle the fact of his being alive—‘there is no saying where the thing would have stopped. Now, how do you think it all arose? *How* do you think it all arose?’ the Major repeated,

rapping the table with great asperity, as he repeated the question.

‘I cannot possibly say,’ Beatrice replied.

‘The letter S, ma’am,’ the Major continued—‘that single letter, ma’am. The fact was, a careless correspondent wrote *Tomkin*, when he should have written *Tomkins*. His charge was levelled against one Mrs. Tomkin. Thistle’s most reasonable and crushing reply was to the effect that his friend’s name was Mrs. Tomkins. The thing was cleared up, and we gave Thistle a dinner last night, and what with our fine dishes and our rare wines, ma’am, and the desire to blot the thing out of Thistle’s memory, no wonder if I am a little yellow this morning. Yellow, ma’am! the wonder is that I am not purple and scarlet as well. Such a night is enough to turn a man into a rainbow.’

Major Sanctuary did not give the impres-

sion of high feeding or deep drinking either; indeed, as he nervously remarked a button of his coat which threatened to come off, and tried to conceal it by putting his hand upon his chest in a careless way, he looked much more like a needy gentleman than the dashing member of twenty-one clubs.

‘And what has brought you down here so early, Major?’ asked Daniel Ruddock, perceiving that the story was concluded.

‘Just dropped down to see my little creature,’ the Major replied, with an air of mingled importance and indifference; ‘I just came to see that my rooms are aired, you know, and all going on well. I return to town to-morrow; you are too still for me here—upon my life you are far too still!’

‘I hope you find your daughter well?’ Beatrice remarked, in her uninterested way.

‘I have not seen Victoria for a long time.’

‘Just what I was thinking,’ the Major cried, like a man who has got an opening for something he wants to say. ‘And I have been scolding Victoria for not availing herself more of your kindness. I assure you, Mrs. Ruddock, nothing gives her father so much pleasure as to hear that she has been entertained by you. She will learn much from you, ma’am, which a girl ought to know; learn it imperceptibly by mere contact’—the Major said this with a gallant bow—‘and besides, ma’am, there is your charming boy. A most engaging little fellow, upon my life. A perfect man of the world in an Eton jacket. Quite a miniature Chesterfield. Ah, Mrs. Ruddock,’ the Major said, significantly, ‘he is a delightful companion for my daughter Victoria. Such a companion as I should choose from ten thousand.’

Beatrice exchanged a very significant look with her husband as the Major paid her son this compliment, and she bit her lip, and so hid a smile.

‘In fact, ma’am,’ the Major continued, emboldened by the progress he had made, and this time not noticing the lady’s ironical lip, ‘that was the reason of my visit this morning. I wish to say that whenever you ask Victoria she will be delighted to come, and that I, as her only parent, highly esteem the opportunities which your pleasant hospitalities offer to my girl.’

Major Sanctuary still maintained his monumental posture ; but, though he looked from one face to another with great alertness, he neither drew any inference from the cold keen eyes of the lady, nor perceived her veiled satiric expression. He did not even see that Daniel Ruddock put his hand to his face to cover an undoubted

grin. For five minutes longer the conversation was kept up with the Major's unfailing vivacity, and then, with many a bow and smile and civil speech, he took his leave.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH IT IS AS WELL FOR MAJOR SANCTUARY
THAT HE IS ON THE OUTER SIDE OF THE
PARLOUR DOOR.

‘Poor fool!’ Daniel said, politely, as the door shut upon the Major. ‘I wonder does he think anyone believes him?’

Beatrice laughed as she arranged the table-cloth, which the eloquent Major had displaced in one of his flighty passages.

‘Twenty clubs!’ continued Daniel, scornfully; ‘more likely one; and pretty well he takes the worth of his money out of *that*. I am told that he has one bed-room at the top of a house in the Strand, and that liter-

ally he passes his whole waking life in the club, never disappearing except at dinner-hour, and then only when there is no chance of an invitation.'

'Did you not remark what he said about Victoria?' asked Beatrice, who had let her imprisoned lip go free.

'Rather!' replied the polished Daniel.

'And our miniature Chesterfield?' continued Beatrice, scornfully. 'He would like to sow the seeds of an affair between Eugene and Victoria. Oh, the impudence of some people!'

'Better put a stop to it at once,' Daniel said, angrily. 'Better give him the cold shoulder—cut him dead; you know how.'

'I cannot cut him, my dear.'

'No? why not, pray?'

'Do you not see?' replied Beatrice, calmly. 'Sir John is the Major's first cousin, and it is through the Major we get

admission to the Hall. Quarrel with the Major, and we lose hold of Sir John. Now, my hope is that by management Bob Sanctuary may fall in love with our Lucy. I should like to see my daughter Lady Sanctuary. You see, Daniel, the thing is possible. We have money, and when Jerome dies we shall have more. The Sanctuaries are poor. The day may come when Lucy Ruddock, with thirty thousand pounds, may be an acceptable wife to a young baronet with an encumbered estate. Oh, no! we must not break with the Major.'

'If you do not break with him,' said Daniel, 'perhaps the Major will be too many for you. Eugene may be hooked and landed before you can prevent it.'

'Leave that to me, Daniel,' his self-reliant wife replied. 'If Eugene is caught by Victoria, or by Victoria's father, I will forgive the catcher, that's all.'

'It is confoundedly impudent of the

Major,' Daniel remarked, with an air of reflection, 'and impudence I cannot stand.'

'Well, well!' Beatrice said, impatiently, 'leave the Major to me. I want you to think about the future. Here is my scheme. Let us get Eugene engaged to Mildred. That I can manage through Jerome. Then, if we can gradually contrive to get up a little attachment between Lucy and Bob Sanctuary——'

'Who will be Sir Robert Sanctuary,' remarked Daniel.

'If Eugene has got a wife so enormously rich, we shall have money to spare for Lucy. Oh, we can make Lucy such a prize that the Sanctuaries will hunt us instead of our hunting them.'

'We have not secured Mildred yet,' remarked Daniel.

'Not yet; but did you not say you had a plan?'

'I did!' cried Daniel, and his face gleam-

ed with satisfaction. 'I have such a plan, Bee, such a plan! To defeat Sally. To get the children into our hands. To secure virtually the guardianship of them. And all in such a way that not Margaret, nor Jerome, nor even Sally herself, will suspect that we had a hand in it. Oh, it is—it *is* a plan !'

He laughed almost in an ecstasy, and rubbed his hands together ; but in the midst of his mirth a fit of coughing seized him and changed his manner in a moment. His thin frame doubled together, and the violence of the cough threatened to throw him into a convulsion. Faint and breathless, at last he sank back in his chair, and, motioning with his hand towards the sideboard, he gasped,

'A drop—a drop—of brandy ; never mind the water. I think I am going to die.'

CHAPTER XIII.

‘ONE OR TWO WORDS WITH YOU.’

I HAVE come to the conclusion that I ought, at this point, to let my readers know the plot of the story. There are novelists—and very great ones—who artfully keep their readers in suspense, about all sorts of matters, right on to the last chapter. Who administered the poison—who used the poinard—who forged the signature to the last will and testament—whether the heroine’s father is the good man of high degree, with light hair and an amiable face, or the dark, low-browed villain who has been prowling about the piece from the begin-

ning—all these matters are left unsettled, keeping the student in most agreeable uncertainty.

To this fine art I make no pretence. In fact, my theatre is not of sufficient size for spectacle and heavy melodrama. I am far more like the travelling performer, who spreads his bit of carpet in the street, drops on his back, shoots his heels into the air, and then, with the assistance of his little family, proceeds to entertain his patrons. Accordingly, I tell all whom it may concern that this is a novel about marriage. The motive of this piece is to exhibit the singular results which may be obtained by judicious experimenters who plan marriages ten or fifteen years before the actual ceremony can take place. There you have the plot in a nutshell. Excepting, perhaps, a shipwreck and a trifle of bigamy, there will not be an event which might not have hap-

pened in a six-roomed house. There will not be a crime which would have cost the offender half-a-crown in any court in the kingdom. The whole affair will be quiet as a minuet. Accordingly, if any reader wants sensation, I advise her to close this novel and wait for my next, when I mean to surprise the public generally.

By the greatest luck I have managed to hit upon the character of a young woman who will go right through the Ten Commandments and the law of England, breaking everything, and at the end will—not die penitent, which is really getting worn out—but turn into a *respectable elderly female living on an annuity*. Together with this there will be a thrilling underplot, all murders and marquises. I have also in my desk a secular extravaganza, the most fanciful and prettiest ever written; all the babies ride thorough-breds and leap five-

barred gates, and the middle-aged men use pap-boats and go-carts; and, besides the original subject, the handling is so facetious that my publishers assure me I am safe for twenty editions. Till these performances appear, at which I am labouring night and day, I advise my sensational and romantic readers to seek their mental meat elsewhere. The present story is intended for that limited class, young gentlemen and ladies who want to get married themselves; and that other limited class, elderly gentlemen and ladies who want to get other people married; and, besides these, for that very limited class indeed who are spectators of life, and amuse themselves with their neighbours' follies.

The story is, in fact, very like a game of chess. Here are Jerome Dawe, Daniel and Beatrice Ruddock, Martha Spring, Sally Badger, Major Sanctuary, and his brother

the baronet; these are the players. Here are Violet and Mildred, Sholto and Eugene, Hector Badger and Bob Sanctuary junior, Lucy Ruddock and Victoria Sanctuary; these are the pieces. At the present moment, in the plot and anticipation of one or other of the players, each of these young people is to marry a particular person. Will he or she do it? Were the plotters wise enough or too wise? What if, at some juncture of the game, the pieces begin to dispose of themselves, skipping from square to square, while the players, perhaps, are laboriously pondering the next move? Out of such few and modest threads I am to weave my novel of 'Golden Girls.'

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. DANIEL RUDDOCK TRIES A BIT OF FLIRTATION,
AND DELIVERS HIS SENTIMENTS ON FRIENDSHIP.

MR. JEROME DAWE was standing in his dining-room, his hat upon his head, his trusty stick Shakespeare in his hand, and a paper between his fingers, upon which were written certain commissions he had to execute; for it was Monday morning, and he was off to do his week's shopping. Martha Spring, flourishing a clothes-brush in her hand, hovered about him tenderly; and, as she saw opportunity, she made dabs at various portions of his person with such zeal that Jerome Dawe shifted backward a little each moment, and was making his

way to the door by a series of retreating shuffles.

‘Gently, Matty, gently,’ he exclaimed, as that devoted female, spying a mark upon his left shoulder, pounced upon the place; ‘that hurts.’

‘Where will you get anyone to take such care of you as your old Matty?’ the warm-hearted creature observed, falling back a step or two, and taking in the general effect of his appearance. ‘There! you look tidy now. Pity such a man should ever go about a sight. Lor,’ said Martha, becoming reflective, ‘to think of that figure being unmarried! Where’s the women’s taste?’

‘Matty,’ Jerome Dawe remarked, with impressiveness, ‘the women’s taste is not the only matter which goes to determine matrimonial connections. There may be men who don’t choose to marry; or again’ — Jerome was a widower himself, and his

first wife had in her day played the mistress over Martha so sharply that her name was carved on that abigail's memory as on marble—'there may be men who have tried once and have not succeeded, and are not going to try again.'

'And there may be men,' Matty rejoined, resting her clothes-brush upon the table, and, while she stood in this statuesque attitude, gazing at him like a parchment Venus, 'there may be men who will meet their fellow at last, and be happy in their old days, with some one to sympathise with 'em and to mend their stockings, and to tend 'em when they have a cold in the head, and so on. Do you believe now, sir, that matches are made in heaven?'

'Matty,' said Jerome Dawe, gravely, 'that is a theological question. Ask me next Sunday, if you please.'

During the course of this improving dia-

logue there passed in front of the house Mr. Daniel Ruddock. He, glancing through the window, and seeing Jerome Dawe, did not (as we might have expected) hurry in to greet his dear friend. On the contrary, he walked rather hastily away, as if wishing to get out of eyeshot of his dear friend. Daniel generally managed to accomplish anything of the kind when he tried, and so it was now ; for, as Jerome Dawe turned one corner of the road, Daniel peeped out from another corner, turning his head this way and that, like a rat looking out of his hole.

Two minutes after, Daniel was standing in Jerome Dawe's dining-room, where Martha Spring was now engaged brushing the crumbs from the cloth.

‘Out, is he?’ said Daniel Ruddock. ‘Dear ! dear ! dear ! What a pity I missed him ! When will he be at home ?’

‘Four,’ replied Matty, tartly, being a little exasperated by a crumb which was out of her reach, though she stretched across the table. ‘There, I have got you for all that!’ which triumphant utterance she addressed to the captured crumb.

Daniel Ruddock had taken his favourite place on the hearth-rug, and was regarding Martha with a crafty look. This look he exchanged all at once for a jocose expression.

‘Matty,’ he said, stepping forward, and poking her in the side, ‘you are an uncommon fine woman!’

Perhaps Martha Spring had experience of Daniel Ruddock’s ways; or perhaps her experience of mankind at large prepared her for this kind of compliment. She did not manifest any great alarm, although she coloured a little.

‘Goodness gracious me!’ she exclaimed;

‘how many people say that to me one time or another!’

‘No wonder, Matty,’ said Daniel, advancing closer to her, while she showed symptoms of dodging him round the table, after the example of Daphne and other renowned ladies of the ancient world. ‘Don’t go away, Matty; I have something to say to you.’

‘Get along with you, do!’ Martha said, with maidenly coyness; and as Daniel came near she retreated, until, unluckily, his advance was arrested by an asthmatic fit, which forced him to throw himself into a chair, where he coughed until he was quite exhausted.

‘Poor fellow!’ Martha ejaculated, stopping in her retreat as perhaps Daphne would have done had Apollo pulled up in mid-chase. ‘Pity you don’t take more care of yourself—or have more care taken of

you. *That's* the fault. You ought to have your black-currant tea, and your woollen socks, and your comforters, and your what-nots ; and many a wife would take care you had 'em too. But Lor', *I* don't know ! Once they are married to a man, they care no more for him than if he was a stock or a stone. There are women that would, though—' at which Martha sighed.

In justice to Mr. Daniel Ruddock it must be said that he was as constant a husband as ever breathed, and, had he been the reverse, it could be by no means likely that he would cheat his wife of any endearments for the sake of bestowing them upon Martha Spring. Long ago, however, Daniel had been under-clerk to a pettifogging attorney ; and, in the service of writs and other minor legal undertakings, he had learned that female vanity can be played upon with great effect, where ulterior ends have to be

gained. But when he saw that Martha blushed and simpered he—being not a rash man—resolved to go no further in this direction. For all that, he meant to improve the complaisant mood he had awakened.

‘Matty! Matty!’ said Daniel, looking at her in a plaintive way, ‘you have been shockingly used of late. I do really feel for you.’

What this meant Martha could not imagine, but, determined not to cast away the sentiment her circumstances had inspired, she shook her head, sighed again, and looked as if she knew all about it.

‘After all your years of faithful service—after your devotion and integrity—to have the chance of making your fortune, and *then* to have it all pick-pocketed, if I may say so, and you left penniless! O, though I don’t pretend to be what you call a feel-

ing man, I feel this, Matty; I do indeed !'

Daniel gave a sympathetic sniff as he said this, and rubbed the corner of his eye.

Curiosity in Martha's breast got the better of policy, and she looked straight at him, and said,

'Whatever do you mean?'

'Mean, Matty?' he answered; 'do you know—of course you cannot know—that when those two wealthy children were first left in Mr. Dawe's keeping his intention was that you—you, Martha Spring—should have charge of them?'

'I never!' exclaimed Martha, holding up her hands.

Undaunted by her wonder and incredulity, Daniel proceeded to lay before her a whole scheme (purely imaginary, it need scarcely be said) which he declared was the original idea of Jerome Dawe. Jerome was to

have moved to a larger house ; a wing of this was to have been set apart for the children and their governess ; Martha was to have been entrusted with the management of their domestic expenditure. Daniel easily convinced the woman, who listened with greedy ears, that in a few years she would have saved a large sum. ‘Something to marry on,’ he said, with a complimentary grin. Besides, Daniel went on to show that, by ingratiating herself with the young heiress, Matty would probably secure for herself an annuity when Miss Walsingham came of age. All this was impudent invention, but Daniel knew what he was about. He warned Martha that he had only surmised all this ; still, his surmises were certainties. Jerome Dawe had really formed the plan ; only Martha must be prepared to hear her master deny the whole. She knew his way, did she not ?

Meanwhile, Daniel charged her not to drop the faintest hint that she had ever suspected anything. And so, having fired her covetousness, and at the same time fenced her in with secrecy on all sides, when Daniel felt he had worked her on to the right point, he inquired, abruptly,

‘Who, think you, Matty, snatched this prize out of your hands?’

‘How can I tell?’ Matty replied.

‘Mrs. Badger!’ cried Daniel, with an involuntary eruption of hatred, which he thought not quite prudent, until he was relieved to see an equal look of enmity on Martha’s face. ‘Mrs. Sally Badger!’

‘I cannot bear that woman,’ he added. ‘Mind, Matty, I am a man of the world. I am what people call a selfish man, Matty. I don’t pretend to love you more than I love myself, Matty. I do not wish Mrs. Badger to get the influence over your master which

she is trying for. That would be bad for me, and bad for you, Matty; worse for you than for me. You and I understand each other. What is your interest is my interest; what is my interest is your interest. Talk as you will about trust and honour, Matty, there is no foundation for mutual confidence like that. Now, Matty, if you are wise, and silent, and do as I wish, why, you will before long have a fortune of your own, as sure as my name is Daniel Ruddock and your name Martha Spring.'

Here followed a long dialogue, full of point and business; but as the issue of the affair will sufficiently inform readers of its substance, and as we are tired of this disagreeable pair, we close the chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH SALLY BADGER SUCCUMBS TO PROVIDENCE
 —SAMUEL BADGER RECALLS PROVIDENCE—MAR-
 GARET ALEXANDER TRUSTS IN PROVIDENCE—
 AND DANIEL RUDDOCK APPEALS TO PROVIDENCE.

SOMETIMES, when an express train is stopping at a station, we who pace the platform, waiting for the starting-bell, notice the careful driver with a long-necked oil-can, like a tin giraffe, letting subtle drops into the machinery here and there, which are to ease the movement when the train sets off again. To this prudent workman I now compare Daniel Ruddock, who, for a time to come, we must fancy employed upon the machinery of his friendly little plot. Now a word, now a smile, now a shrug of the shoulders, bolder strokes at times—so Daniel

busies himself, through it all contriving the defeat of Sally Badger, and the capture of the Golden Girls.

Him we leave and return to Sally Badger's modest little house. Great is the stir, mighty is the bustle, in which Mrs. Badger lives herself and makes her household live. A new house has been taken, of larger size and better appearance, and Sally is working, morning, noon, and night, at furniture and furnishing plans. What bits of carpet, nearly trampled out in the old house, can be cut or fitted to rooms and passages of the new; where fresh must be bought; whether the furniture of the present drawing-room will be good enough for the future parlour; how the drawing-room itself can be most cheaply arrayed in splendour: these are the problems Sally Badger revolves. Day and night wonderful Sally goes about with pencil and paper ever in her pocket,

and when she gets a new idea down it goes ; and she has awful columns of figures on the paper, and the figures get dim with time and the friction of Sally's bunch of keys ; and Sally at last confounds the subtraction and addition columns, and thinks all at once that she has fifteen pounds more to pay than she calculated. Down she sits suddenly on a box, and puts her hand to her brow and feels she had better give up the battle of life once for all.

‘Sally, my dear one,’ said Mr. Badger, who happened to be at hand on this appalling occasion, ‘do not give way.’

‘Oh, Sammy, Sammy,’ she cried, moved by the pathos of the occasion to confide in him, ‘I have made a dreadful mistake. We want fifteen pounds more. Oh, what shall we do?’

‘Now, my dear,’ cried Samuel, almost vivaciously, for he saw her mistake, and his

bosom was glowing to think that he, her humble husband, would for once correct and re-inspirit her, 'you have added seven-ten, when you should have subtracted seven-ten. Look there. The total is sixty-five; just what you always said, my dear. You never are wrong—in the long-run. The total is just sixty-five.'

'So it is!' Sally exclaimed, joyfully. 'Oh, what a relief! Sammy, after all I could not get on without you!'

Never, during their married life, had she paid her husband such a compliment. It quite lifted him up. He went down to the bank that morning with head so erect that his friends thought he had been having his boots new heeled; and when he heard a barrel organ playing 'See the Conquering Hero comes,' Samuel thought that inanimate things were breaking forth in praise of him and his achievement.

Meanwhile, Mildred and Violet had taken quite a fancy to the Badger household and ways. At first Mildred had been inclined to regard the whole concern with disdain, a mood in which she was encouraged by her maid, who heartily despised the poverty of the people and the place. But gradually Mrs. Badger gained an influence over this singular child.

Mildred was haughty, unbending, and imperious, and both her own qualities and those of her new guardian seemed to prognosticate disputes and dislike. The event was just the reverse of such an expectation. Sally Badger's inflexible and outspoken character inspired even Mildred with awe, but in the awe there was a germ of liking. Mildred would listen with the utmost attention while Sally delivered her opinions or her commands. In every juncture of the little household life, the child waited until

she saw what Mrs. Badger wished to be done, and she acquiesced in this with perfect confidence. Sally Badger, without at all judging the child's character, or grounding her opinions on any theoretical views, but moved only by the force of similitude, began to like Mildred heartily.

'That child never disobeys me,' she used to say, with warm approval. 'In my sight or out of my sight, I can trust her wherever she goes.'

This was quite true. Sally's dogmatic character had so impressed Mildred that Sally herself was in her eyes the embodiment of rectitude and wisdom, and, while more than ever apt to be wayward and haughty with others, she surrendered her will wholly into the keeping of the potent Mrs. Badger.

It was immense fun for the children—especially for Mildred—to follow all the

details of the furnishing of the new house. Mildred went to all the shops with Mrs. Badger, marked her choice of patterns, listened while she cheapened the goods, and actually once or twice managed to correct her in small mistakes of memory. Mrs. Badger received the correction not only with submission, but in a mood of gratification.

‘I wish, Milly,’ she cried, ‘that you had been my own child. Look at Hector over there!’

Master Badger was perched on the top of a roll of carpet, deep in a book, and his mother regarded him with despair, and talked to Mildred as if she were a woman grown.

‘He never does anything else but read! I believe if the sky were to fall that boy would look up from his book for a minute and then turn over the leaf. Oh, that

Providence had given me a practical son ! But I foresaw all this even while he was a baby. You are quite right, dear, it *was* the brown carpet I chose for the little bedroom.'

And Sally beamed approval at Mildred, who felt the honour as much as if she had been a sheriff receiving knighthood.

Meanwhile, whenever it was possible, little Violet was allowed to share in the fun of the furnishing ; only, as for the most part she was wheeled or carried, her movements were circumscribed. But she had plenty to say, and would find a similitude for every wall-paper and carpet, likening one to a field with daisies, and the other to a spreading tree. She had the funniest little comparisons for all she saw : a curiously shaped coal scuttle reminded her of a gondola, and the shovel was the gondolier. Peeling into tiny laughter at each conceit,

and looking so frail, and so frolicsome, and so exquisitely lovely, she suggested the absolutely new idea of a merry angel. But often, in the very midst of a laugh, the little creature would stop and pant, and then put her white hand to her forehead with a weary sigh, looking older and wiser and sadder than a child should.

Poor Sally Badger, weighted by her indolent husband and her abstracted son, tugged and pushed at her furnishing with amazing energy. All day long she was fitting, measuring, planning; and far into the night she sat sewing carpets together, and working out the contrivances which she had devised during the day. She tried to make the meals comfortable, but scarcely ate a morsel herself; and in vain would Samuel Badger, looking up from his plate, beseech her to take 'some support for the system, Sally, my love.' She would be off

to her stitching; and Samuel, seeing that she could not be persuaded, would settle himself comfortably down to the table and start afresh. Mildred, as soon as possible, would steal away and stand beside Mrs. Badger, marking every motion of her active fingers, and noting every expedient with which she faced the simultaneous difficulties of floor and carpet.

At last everything was ready, and Saturday night came. They were to move early on Monday morning, and Sholto and Eugene had come in to tea, and to have a game with the little girls. Sally, after a fatiguing day, set herself to muster up such preparations as she could for the evening meal, and, until the table was set and the children seated round it, her feet never rested. Then she sat down.

‘Now, Sally, my love,’ Mr. Badger said, ‘have a little bread and butter. Do you

know,' addressing the company at large, 'there are few things more reviving than bread-and-butter—in a quiet way.'

Mrs. Badger sat resting her cheek upon her hand, but did not speak. There was a strange look in her eyes, and a deep flush upon her cheek; and, after the meal had proceeded a little while in silence, she threw herself back in her chair, and her arms fell to her side—useless, it seemed, these untiring arms.

'Sammy,' she called out, 'my head feels so heavy. The room is going round. Sammy! I am falling off my chair.'

'Nothing of the kind, my dear,' replied Samuel, reassuringly. 'It is only nervousness. If you would try a little bread-and-butter, and some nice hot tea, my dear, you would be better in a very short time.'

'Mrs. Badger is falling!' cried Sholto; and, leaping up actively, the little fellow

was at her side, propping her up just as she fainted away. Luckily she had not slipped quite off the chair, and the sturdy lad held her up bravely.

All was confusion. Even the sluggish Samuel Badger grew alarmed and bustled about, and Mildred turned very pale, while Violet, in vague alarm, began to cry.

‘I think, Hector,’ Mr. Badger said at last, ‘if this goes on very much longer, you had better run for the doctor.’

‘Let me, sir,’ cried Sholto, eagerly; ‘I run faster than Hector.’

And, scarcely waiting for authority, Sholto started off, while Mr. Badger, with the help of his son and little Eugene, managed to move the now unconscious Sally to the sofa.

The doctor lived close at hand, and panting Sholto returned with him in a few minutes. Mrs. Badger had revived before

he appeared, and was able to answer his questions. But as he made his examination a grave look passed over his face.

‘She must be put to bed immediately,’ he said, in a low voice, to Mr. Badger. ‘This is a serious case. It is the old story; more spirit than strength.’

‘Yes,’ Samuel Badger replied, in one of his audible whispers; ‘I quite understand. A medical gentleman once gave a similar opinion in my case. His remark was, “Badger, you are not only a sword, you are a sword far too keen for your scabbard.” He was by no means sanguine of my recovery, entirely on that account—keenness; however, by the interposition of Providence, I rallied.’

‘Let Mrs. Badger be put to bed at once,’ the doctor said, rather tartly. ‘I shall look in again in two hours’ time.’

It was curious to see Mildred, with fear

in her face, standing at Mrs. Badger's side, and not heeding the solicitations of her maid that she would come up to her own room. In these exhortations little Eugene joined with great politeness.

'You know, Mildred,' he said, 'it cannot be good for you to be watching anybody who is so very ill.'

'I don't see what you have got to do with it,' Mildred replied, extinguishing him with one of her fixed looks.

'Look here,' said Sholto, thrusting himself before Mildred in his blunt way, 'Eugene and I must be off. Where is Violet? I must say good-night to Violet;' and he ran into the passage, where, finding the timid creature in silent tears, 'Oh, don't cry, Violet,' said he, taking her hand; 'you know people are often ill this way, and they always get well next morning.'

'Good-bye, Mildred,' Eugene said, for

she had followed them into the hall.

She did not answer, and the two were starting off, when Mildred called out,

‘Sholto! you never said good-bye to me.’

‘I never did!’ he answered. ‘I always *do* forget you, Milly. Good-bye. Mind you tell Violet not to cry.’

The two boys raced homeward, breaking from each other when they came to the cross-road.

‘Mamma! mamma!’ Sholto cried, dashing into the house, ‘Cousin Sally is very ill. She fell off her chair at tea—nearly off, I mean; and the doctor came, and he says it is very serious.’

Worthy Margaret Alexander went straight to her room and put on her bonnet and shawl.

‘We must hope that, by the mercy of Providence, she will be spared,’ the good

woman said, and she offered up a prayer for her cousin as she made ready. She knew how great a catastrophe Sally's illness at such a time would be, and the good-natured Sholto, alarmed afresh by his mother's alarm, returned with her to the disturbed house of the Badgers.

Almost at the same moment Eugene walked daintily into the room where his father and mother were sitting.

'Mamma,' he said, in his polite way, but with conscious importance, 'I have news for you. Mrs. Badger is ill—very ill indeed, the doctor says.'

The boy guessed that this piece of intelligence would interest his father and mother, and, in reply to their questions, he gave them a full account of what had happened.

'Sad for poor Sally,' Daniel remarked, rather late in the conversation, however.

‘Why did she work so hard?’ Beatrice said, harshly. It seemed she cared less for appearances than he did.

‘Papa,’ Eugene asked, ‘if Mrs. Badger got very ill, or if she died, then, I suppose, Mildred and Violet would be taken away, would they not?’

Daniel looked at his son, then at his wife; at the boy with admiration, and at the mother with symptoms of an impending wink.

‘There is half-a-crown for you, Eugene,’ he said, having rummaged for the coin in his pocket. ‘Go and play your fiddle. Aha, Bee!’ he said to his wife, as the door closed upon the hope of their house, ‘that is a clever lad. He sees the consequence, does Eugene. Sally! Sally! you are not so powerful as you fancy. Things are not to be all your own way. Do you know, Bee, I feel better to-night than I have done for

six months, Soho, Mrs. Sally! I rather think we shall find means to fit you out, strong as you think yourself. What do you say, Bee, to a stroll over to see Jerome? We might feel our way a little further after this bit of news. Soho, Mrs. Sally,—he could not resist the temptation of addressing her in this visionary fashion—‘you baited your hook. Very good. Your fish nibbled. Very good again. You landed your fish safe and sound, didn’t you? Very, *very* good! But who carried the fish home, Mrs. Sally? Who cooked it? Who ate it? Oh, Sally, Sally,’ cried Daniel, falling into a moral vein, ‘have you never heard of Providence? Have you never heard that man *proposes*, but God *disposes*?’

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH DANIEL RUDDOCK FALLS DOWN AND
BREAKS HIS CROWN; AND MARTHA SPRING
HAS A TUMBLE AFTER.

WHILE our two little Golden Girls lay sleeping that night, twined in each other's arms, as their habit was, wily Daniel Ruddock began to spin a web around them. They might have been two gay little flies, with bright bodies and gauzy wings, creatures framed for sunlight and calm, and he a greedy ugly spider making the snare ready for them, although—as is the spider's way—he seemed wholly intent on lawful business. One wonders what the spider

thinks of himself. Does he ever reflect, 'I am a bloodthirsty wretch, living on weakness and innocence'? Or does his self-knowledge express itself in this form, 'I am a highly respectable and laborious member of society, and integrity, ingenuity, and industry have made my fortune'?

Think the spider what he may, Daniel Ruddock never once suspected that he was a mean scoundrel. His view of human life made it a game of skill, where one player has to hold his own against all the world. Having regard to these tremendous odds, Daniel Ruddock held that, in certain junctures of the game, you must lie to the powerful, cheat the wise, and bully the feeble; and in this he no more thought himself a wrongdoer than a soldier considers himself a murderer when he sees the enemy drop to the crack of his rifle. Daniel judged that he was rather a good man on

the whole. The fault lay in the game, not in the player.

Accordingly, he and Beatrice strolled over to Jerome Dawe, and the harmonious pair executed a kind of duet of flattery, extolling the mind, the face, the character, the habits of their dear friend ; always managing in the old way to be tell-tales upon each other ; Daniel letting Jerome know something which Beatrice had said the night but one before, Beatrice protesting against the breach of confidence ; then Beatrice, in laughing revenge upon her husband, declaring that *she* would repeat one of *his* sayings, which she did, in spite of all his expostulation. Each of these disclosures went to show that Daniel and Beatrice believed, in their inmost souls, that such a man as Jerome Dawe never had lived before, and never would live again. Meanwhile, Jerome Dawe, inhaling this delightful incense, became, to drop into a modern comparison,

very like a man who is judiciously treated with laughing-gas. His spirits rose immensely. He laughed aloud. He slapped his knees until his palms tingled with the stroke. Altogether, he believed himself to be a pillar of manhood, and that these two people were forced, by the supremacy of his character, to gaze up at him as they did.

It was a picture. The tall, imposing, elderly gentleman, with twinkling eyes, incessant smiles, and face turning about with delighted rapidity from flatterer to flatterer. The handsome woman, with speech as soft as oil, and not a solitary defaulting feature to show that she was playing a part; well-dressed, easy in her posture, one white soft hand caressing the hand of Jerome, so naturally that you might have sworn she was doing it unconsciously. Daniel himself, crabbed, croaking, with serpentine subtlety in every line of his hard face, fawning, jok-

ing, and sniggering until, at the wittiest points, the tops of his shoulders touched the tips of his ears.

Daniel at last rose to go. His wife looked at him as if he had forgotten something ; but as he did not regard her she wisely concluded that, for some good reason of his own, he had postponed the business of the night. Jerome was reluctant to part with them, but Daniel said they must go.

‘In fact,’ he said, ‘we only strolled out for a mouthful of air, as I had been in the house all day.’

‘And for something more,’ his wife added. ‘Because you were tired of work, and tired of me, and you said, “Let me hear one or two of Jerome’s good stories.”’

‘Tired of you, eh?’ cried Jerome, enraptured afresh. ‘And wanted to hear one of my good stories? Well, perhaps I do know a good story or two.’

‘It’s your memory, you see,’ Daniel said, shaking his head in hopeless envy of that prodigious faculty. ‘Good night, Jerome.’

Daniel was half-way down-stairs, and Beatrice, wondering still at his policy, had said her own good night, when Daniel came up again.

‘By the way, I quite forgot, poor Sally is very ill.’

‘Sally!’ exclaimed Jerome. ‘Why, she was here this morning.’

‘She won’t be here to-morrow morning,’ replied Daniel, with a curious blunt air; ‘and she won’t be here the morning after that. The doctor gives a bad account of her. I have seen it coming on for a long time. That woman will die, Jerome! Good night again.’

Simple-minded Daniel began to descend the stairs again; Sally Badger’s illness being obviously no farther concern of his, except

on grounds of philanthropy and relationship—Sally being a human being, a friend, and a family connection.

‘Stop, Daniel, stop!’ Jerome Dawe called out, in great excitement. ‘Don’t go away in such a hurry. If Sally is taken ill it will be a serious matter for me. I must talk this over. I must have your advice.’

‘*He* must have *my* advice!’ cried Daniel, from a dark depth of the stair. He laid emphasis on the pronouns in jocose comparison of his own mental feebleness with Jerome’s immeasurable strength. ‘My advice! That is a good one! He, he, he! I ought not to laugh, though, and poor Sally in such danger.’

Whether at this point Fate inserted a twitch of conscience or a false step is uncertain, but the event is simple matter of history. Daniel missed his footing; and he performed the remainder of the downstairs

journey with amazing rapidity, being instantaneously heard in collision with various portions of the wood and masonry ; and finally he produced sounds, as if he were sliding across the floor-cloth ; and he wound up with a bump, as if he had been skating.

Through accident, or from habits of stinginess, the hall lamp had not been lighted ; and now silence and darkness reigned for a moment. Then a door was hastily thrown open below, and Martha Spring, with a candle in her hand, rushed upon the scene. It appeared, from her movements, that this learned lady believed the noise to have come from overhead, for she held her candle aloft, and looked at the ceiling. This being so, and her progress being rapid, she came upon the prostrate body of Daniel before he had time even to groan. Daniel, moved by fear of being trampled to death, seized her by the leg, which was

descending upon his chest like a steam hammer. The consequence of this purely self-defensive movement was that Martha swung with fearful velocity downwards; the candlestick departed into the air, where it performed a series of evolutions, and finally announced the return of darkness with a crash, as it fell upon the floor; simultaneously the falling head of Martha cracked against the fallen head of Daniel, with a noise as if two wooden basins had met in mid-air, and with such realistic and persistent optical effects upon the patients that neither of them had the least suspicion that the candle had gone out.

The reign of silence was then renewed, like that of darkness, until Beatrice, flying into the drawing-room, came back with a light. A most sorrowful picture was now revealed. Daniel Ruddock, whose reason appeared to have taken an everlasting

flight, was still grasping Martha by the ankle, while she, on her part, struggled fearfully, being well assured that she was in the hands of a burglar, and that it was a question of life and death. Even when the dim candlelight enabled her to recognise Daniel, her conduct was still governed by the conviction that he had deliberately planned an act of violence; and between Daniel's anguish and Matty's indignation, and the confusion of their joint faculties, there is little doubt that in a few seconds the two would have been cuffing and scratching each other, had not Jerome Dawe by this time descended to the scene. Like all blockheads, Jerome Dawe enjoyed the minor misfortunes of his friends, and indeed he was not greatly to blame for bursting into a loud laugh at the spectacle which lay at his feet. He touched Martha with his foot in a facetious way.

‘Well done, Matty, I declare!’ he said. ‘Daniel, my boy, you tripped her up cleverly. You never went downstairs faster than that in your life!’

Daniel rose, not particularly soothed by observing that even his wife smiled at his woeful appearance. Matty, whose temper was acrimonious, got upon her feet with difficulty, and eyed about her, as if looking for some one with whom she might safely engage in battle. But Daniel and Matty, like many incensed persons of greater figure, were forced to smother their rage in their own breasts; and at last, by exquisite efforts, each managed to squeeze out a smile.

This deplorable accident need not have been described, only that it passed into the action of this history. The four stood in the passage, Jerome Dawe, Daniel and Beatrice Ruddock, and Martha Spring, the

latter being allowed to remain as some compensation for the indignities she had suffered. The talk soon turned on the illness of Sally Badger, and the probable consequences of that catastrophe. Hereupon Daniel Ruddock became civil to Martha Spring, and with an appearance of accident, which, as a feat of representation, cannot be too highly praised, he gradually opened out, before Jerome and Martha, a well-articulated scheme for the defeat of Sally Badger and the capture of the Golden Girls. This scheme Daniel represented as coming into his head, bit by bit, while they talked; in reality it had been long and well prepared. Jerome listened with his air of pompous profundity. Matty devoured the whole greedily, and grinned in silent recognition of the speaker's cleverness. Daniel hooped his shoulders, and crossed finger upon finger, and croaked as

if he were a human raven ; Beatrice stood by, bland, handsome, dangerous. A quartette, reader, a quartette !

And still in each other's innocent arms, unconscious and peaceful, the little Golden Girls lay sleeping.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH SIMPLE SAMUEL MEETS A DANIEL WHO
LETS HIM TASTE HIS WARES.

SALLY BADGER was very ill. Her labours, her anxiety, and the poverty which aggravated all she went through, had so lowered her system that she sank into a fever, from which her doctor prognosticated the worst. She lay half unconscious; but whenever she roused out of stupor her talk was business, the children, the new house, the furniture, and how soon she must get about again! Only once or twice she added, gloomily,

‘That is, if I ever get about again at all.’

How unprotected are poor people from

misfortunes of every kind! The same penury which had sloped poor Sally's way down to this fever, had also left her affairs dangerously open to the sinister plots of Daniel Ruddock. Poor Sally had not ten pounds of ready cash in the whole world. To furnish her new house she had been under the necessity of drawing heavily upon Jerome Dawe; that is, she had asked him to advance certain portions of the allowance which he proposed to make for the maintenance of the Golden Girls. This advance he had promised, but the money was not yet paid, and, in fact, the furniture had been bought, and the new house had been taken, partly in the great name of Jerome Dawe. Sally's payments were often behind, and she would have found it hard to get anything like large credit in Middleborough. Thus it came to pass that the house and the furniture were in a manner under the con-

trol of Jerome Dawe ; and Daniel Rud-dock, who well knew this, saw here an avenue to the accomplishment of his great design.

First of all Daniel shuffled off to Samuel Badger, and, with a face of the utmost concern, made inquiries about Sally, winding up this way,

‘As the new house is ready, Samuel, and as quiet is so essential for Sally, do you not think that the children—Mildred and Violet, I mean—ought to be moved in? Mrs. Spring will take charge of them till Sally is well again.’

‘Upon my word,’ Samuel Badger exclaimed, ‘that is the cleverest suggestion I have ever heard. It shall be done. Sally will be so much obliged to you. I will go and tell Sally at once.’

‘Stay a moment,’ cried Daniel, catching the tail of his coat in great trepidation. ‘If

I were you I should not mention it to Sally. Sick people worry so. Do not give Sally the least idea of what you are doing.'

'Upon my word,' exclaimed simple Samuel again, 'this is a cleverer suggestion than the other. I shall not let Sally know the children have gone out of the house.'

So that very afternoon the Golden Girls were conveyed to the new house, which was glowing with fires, and looking very comfortable; and Martha Spring stood in the doorway, already in her own fancy the mistress of that proud abode. As Mildred entered, the engaging virgin caught her, and administered a hug which she thought would be agreeable to the child.

'Let me go!' cried Mildred, furiously; and extricating herself, she stamped in the hall with passion. 'How dare you touch

me, you horrid old woman ! Are you another servant ?'

Martha released the little girl, greatly amazed and incensed at her boldness. Inly she vowed that when her authority had been fully established she would pay this impudent miss handsomely for her insulting behaviour. At present miss seemed to have the best of it, for, wheeling imperiously round as Violet came up in her maid's arms, Mildred called out,

'Little, see that woman does not touch Miss Violet !'

And this fairy empress walked into the dining-room, the door of which lay open, while Martha Spring stood in the passage, clenching her fists as if she were a prize-fighter.

At that moment Daniel Ruddock was seen coming up the gravel walk, and immediately Martha flew to meet him, and

the excellent couple became absorbed in conversation.

‘See how advantageous your position is, Martha,’ said Daniel. ‘It is not every woman I would have done this for. Nor any woman except yourself, Mat. And why you? Because I love you, Matty? Because I love you better than myself, eh, Matty? Not a bit of it!’ cried Daniel, frankly. ‘I do it because I want your help, and you want mine. And we can trust each other, because we each want each other. Oh! Matty, that is the foundation for true friendship, believe me. And what would life be without friendship? A wilderness, Matty, a howling wilderness! See what a position yours is. You have not even to give up Mr. Dawe’s situation. Only two minutes’ walk between the two houses! You can do your housekeeping over there; then on with your bonnet and

shawl, or in damp weather take your umbrella, and here you are for the arrangements in the morning. The walking will do you good, Matty—the little bit of walking. Walking is so good for the wholesomes. It will add years to your life. And you will have these children for ten years or more if you play your cards well, and then, whatever happens, Matty, you will be a rich woman ; and riches, Matty, riches, what is life without riches? Another wilderness, Matty, howling louder than the first one.'

'That eldest girl is a little viper,' said Matty, vindictively. 'If it was only safe, I would——'

'It will be safe soon, Mat,' Daniel replied, with a soothing and hopeful air. 'Perfectly safe. Only not just yet. You may do many a thing when you are in the saddle which could not be done when you

have only got your foot in the stirrup, and many a kick that would knock you off before you get on—you know what I mean—when you are well mounted only makes the gallop pleasanter.'

'Very well ; I'll wait,' Matty remarked, grimly, 'till I'm in the saddle.'

'Do so, Matty. Now mind, you must keep Mr. Dawe up to it. The business part—the house-letting, the furniture—I shall manage. It must be your part to see that Mrs. Badger never sets foot on that brass ;' Daniel pointed to the threshold. 'Remember, once she sets her foot on that brass you will be dished, and I will be dished—in fact, everybody will be dished. I am now speaking on the supposition that Mrs. Badger recovers ; if it should please Providence *not* to bless the means used for her restoration'—Daniel looked serious

here—‘why then, Matty, all our anxiety will be over.’

‘I am not afraid of Mrs. Badger,’ said Martha, defiantly. ‘Sally Badger!’—she gave an insolent laugh—‘I shall be one too many for her, I promise you.’

‘Well, if you are going to be one too many for Mrs. Badger,’ retorted Daniel, with a serious air, ‘you must be at least thirteen to begin with, for she would match any dozen women I ever met.’

‘Leave Sally Badger to me,’ replied Matty. She found an insolent pleasure in this freedom with the name.

‘You may talk to her out of the window,’ said Daniel, rather uneasy, it seemed, at his confederate’s self-confidence. ‘But once you open the door to her—However, Matty,’ he added, breaking off with a new thought, ‘one thing is certain—she can’t come here for long enough yet.’

‘What does my master say to all this?’ asked Martha, changing the conversation.

‘Is he agreeable?’

‘Partly he is,’ replied Daniel, ‘altogether he will be. We have to manage that, you and me, Mat. And I have asked him to look in and meet me here this afternoon, about this hour. Why, Mat, as sure as I live, there comes his hat! Now mind, Matty, we must persuade Mr. Dawe. You know what I mean. We must manage him. We understand each other, and we are useful to each other, are we not, Matty, you and me?’

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH JEROME DAWE, DANIEL RUDDOCK, AND
MARTHA SPRING ROAR WITH LAUGHTER.

HAD there been any spectators of classical education to consider Mr. Jerome Dawe as he walked with stately step up the garden, these, marking his awful visage, his magnificent head, his world-subduing stride, and the roll of his commanding voice, might have pronounced him a good modern image of the thundering Jove of heathen times. And if—as is perfectly possible—the thundering Jove of heathen times was little better than a pompous impostor, whose grand display of parts was a sham and a deceit

played off on mankind, the instructed spectator would have judged the image absolutely perfect. In fact, when Mr. Jerome Dawe rested Shakespeare in the gravel, and inclined the weight of his body thereon, and gazed round him with an air of majestic contemplation, he might have been Olympian Jove modernised, in stockings and breeches and a frilled shirt, with a trace of snuff on the front of his waistcoat to complete the illusion.

‘Daniel, my boy,’ said the Olympian Jove, with a movement as if he meant to recover his perpendicular, and, having done so, poke Daniel in the ribs with Shakespeare, ‘this is a pretty sort of place. Sally has lighted on her feet.’

‘Sally! Ha! ha! ha!’ cried Daniel, suddenly struck with a droll fancy, and making abrupt movements of his body as he laughed, until, between his action and the

sound he sent forth, he produced the general effect of a sawyer going through a knotty plank. 'Sally! Yes; I see. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Daniel,' said Jerome Dawe, solemnly, 'I hope your reason is not affected.'

'Ha! ha! ha!' cried Daniel again. 'He hopes *my* reason is not affected! *His* ain't, that's cock-sure.'

'Matty,' said Jerome Dawe, turning to his housekeeper with some concern, 'can you explain this?'

He pointed Shakespeare at Daniel Rud-dock as if he were a lecturer and Daniel a subject.

'Explain it,' replied Martha Spring, tittering; 'not I. How should I know the goings on you two have between yourselves?'

Martha Spring burst out laughing after this playful rejoinder; and Jerome himself,

looking grave and full of wonder for a moment, as well he might, suffered his features to relax, and at last broke into a knowing smile.

‘You call me a clever fellow at a joke, Daniel?’ he said. ‘A downright clever fellow at a joke, eh?’

Jerome put this question not because he had the faintest idea what the joke was, but because he was unwilling to lose praise from any source.

‘Honestly now, a real laughable joke, eh, Dan?’

Daniel began laughing himself, and Martha joined in, and finally Jerome Dawe himself brought up the rear with a tremendous peal of self-approving mirth. The three stood thus, laughing one against the other like buffo singers. Jerome Dawe felt that the louder and the longer laughter, the greater the testimony to his power as

a mirth-producer; so he resolved to encourage the others, and went on laughing, peal after peal, and Daniel Ruddock was forced to follow on until he could laugh no more.

This prologue having been finished and gravity resumed, Daniel proceeded, with infinite audacity, to tell Jerome that he had perceived—and that Martha, who still stood with them, had also perceived—that the two girls were to be removed from the charge of Sally Badger, and handed over to Mrs. Spring. That a more suitable arrangement the wit of man could not have devised. That this house and its furniture were, to all intents and purposes, the property of Jerome Dawe. That Sally was too poor to be able to object practically to the arrangement. That in any case her recovery was uncertain. That Martha would still be able to retain her post as house-

keeper in the establishment of Jerome himself. That the girls would be truly happy under the regulation of that excellent creature, Martha—he would say it twice before her face—that excellent creature, Martha! That a better woman, a more refined being, a more motherly individual, a more entertaining and naturally genteel person than Martha Spring did not walk upon this earth. That it was to Daniel a great effort to say all this in her presence. But that where duty called Daniel, Daniel always answered duty. Finally, that the whole of this arrangement, which, for sagacity, far surpassed ordinary human skill, was devised by Jerome Dawe himself, alone and unaided; a man who could plan his secret, and then step calmly into affairs, and execute his designs without any apparent effort.

From first to last, this mendacious ad-

dress was delivered with the most staggering effrontery, and Martha Spring acted as chorus, coming in at the end of every paragraph with a fervent expression of assent. Only, when Daniel spoke of her own virtues, the accomplished lady blushed with honourable shame ; and when he began a second paragraph of panegyric, she yielded to the promptings of her natural vivacity, and said to Daniel Ruddock, 'Go along, do!' an address which she enforced by a lady-like dig in the ribs, which dig being delivered in a moment of exalted feeling, and being, by the finger of Fate, directed to a sensitive part, made Daniel sore for a week. However, with this exception, the entire performance was got through with great success, and Jerome Dawe was half convinced that he had really made this fine arrangement in the secrecy of his own capacious head !

‘Come in, then,’ cried he. ‘Come into the house. Let us see how the children are getting on.’

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH A YOUNG CHILD AND A SICK WOMAN ARE
MORE THAN A MATCH FOR TWO KNAVES AND
A FOOL.

INTO the house they came. And, turning into the dining-room, they found Mildred with her maid, and little Violet lying fatigued on a sofa. Mildred was engaged in an argument with the woman.

‘When is Mrs. Badger coming here?’ she asked, in a passionate voice. ‘Little, you must tell me!’

‘Mrs. Badger is very ill, miss,’ Little replied. Here she gave a knowing look at Martha Spring, for the two were already friends, and Little knew there was some-

thing in the wind. 'I know nothing much about Mrs. Badger—and I care less, miss,' she added, with a curious desire to be impudent towards Mrs. Badger and humble to her young mistress in the same breath.

Mr. Jerome Dawe entered the room at this moment, and Mildred marched up to him, with erect step and clear resolute eyes. She spoke, however, with respect, for not only did she know that Jerome Dawe was her guardian, but there was in his manner something which the high-bred child recognised as of a higher note than the behaviour of the rest.

'I want to know, if you please,' she said, 'when Mrs. Badger is coming to this house?'

'Really, child,' replied Jerome Dawe, 'that is what nobody can say. She is so very ill, you see.'

'Does Mrs. Badger know that Violet and

'I have come to this house?' the child asked, with remarkable energy and sharpness.

Two replies came in the same breath.

'Of course she knows all about it.'

So said Daniel Ruddock.

'Mrs. Badger does *not* know you have come to this house.'

So said Jerome Dawe.

This coincidence of truth and falsehood was a little embarrassing, especially to Daniel Ruddock; but as, by education and habit, he was thoroughly used to lying, and not altogether unaccustomed to being found out, he managed to add, with tolerable composure,

'I meant to say Mrs. Badger does *not* know.'

Mildred stood in the centre of the room with her tall slender frame and fearless face, a splendid specimen of a little patrician; and Violet, with her wondering eyes

set on her sister, made a most striking contrast. Round the two children all these deceitful, plotting people were grouped, and not one of them ashamed at what they felt or saw.

‘I think,’ Mildred said, looking at Jerome Dawe, ‘if you please, we will go back to Mrs. Badger’s house.’

Now, it was not in Jerome’s nature to make decisive replies; and in answer to this he only said,

‘Well, Mildred—we shall see—we shall see what can be done.’

This evasive answer led to a complication. For Daniel Ruddock began to fear that the whole plot might fail, and resolved by bolder strokes to make an end of opposition.

‘You have got to stay in this house, little missy!’ he said. ‘Mrs. Badger is nobody here, and you must do what you are bid.’

It was a fine sight to see the child regarding this creeping fellow with a look of courage and disdain quite beyond her years. Even Daniel felt uncomfortable, and wished the affair over.

‘You have no right to speak to me,’ Mildred said, imperiously. Then she turned again to Jerome Dawe.

‘We are to go back to Mrs. Badger, are we not? You want to go, don’t you, Violet?’

Violet with her wondering eyes still fixed on her sister’s face, and too timid to speak aloud, made a movement of her lips for yes.

‘She says yes,’ Mildred cried, eagerly. ‘We both want to go back. Oh, we are to go back, are we not?’

This was addressed to Jerome Dawe, and Daniel, now seriously afraid that all his labours might be undone by the spirit of

the child, caught her by the wrist, and, in an angry voice, said,

‘ You are only a baby, you ! You must do what you are told, little missy ! do you hear ? ’

Mildred wrested her hand out of his rude grasp, and, with a cheek on fire, she looked at him, irresolute for a moment.

‘ I know what to do,’ she said at last. ‘ I remember what mamma did once.’

She walked to the bell and rang it, and then, looking at the group again, and seeing her maid,

‘ Little,’ she said, ‘ show that person out.’

She indicated Daniel Ruddock with a queen-like wave of her hand, and so stood in the midst of the amazed group, every one of whom was too mean to be struck by the ludicrous side of the scene. For a moment, Mildred stood with her hand raised, and Violet was just beginning to

cry for fear, and even Daniel was checked. But he roused himself, and now, with direct brutality and consciousness of strength, he called out,

‘You minx! You saucy girl! You shall see who is your master.’

But little Mildred was not to be left any longer to struggle alone.

As Daniel Ruddock advanced towards her, the door of the room was suddenly flung open, and staggering, rather than walking, Sally Badger herself came in upon them. Fever was in her face, and her whole look was death-like, and so thunder-struck were all the group as, with an unearthly gaze, she looked round upon them, that no one saw Margaret Alexander, who followed her cousin into the room, and stood in the background silent.

‘Who—has dared—has dared to do this?’ asked Sally Badger, delivering her

question with an emphasis which was the more terrible from the very fact that she was visibly struggling against mortal weakness.

She looked upon them all, and no one dared to speak; only little Mildred walked to her side, and, taking her hand,

‘Oh, Mrs. Badger,’ she said, in a low voice, ‘I am so glad you have come.’

‘Who has dared to do it?’ demanded Sally again; and, with the fever blazing on her cheek, the awful light in her eyes, and the tremor of her frame, she was indeed a terrible spectacle.

Nobody spoke. Then, with terrific rapidity, Sally turned round on Daniel Ruddock, and stretched out her thin shaking hand.

‘Uncle Jerome did not do this!’ she said. ‘It is you, you plotting, skulking reptile!’

Daniel Ruddock, in his early days, had often faced women desperate through poverty and oppression, and he knew that their rage is invariably too great for their strength. So now, emboldened by the very intensity of affairs, he resolved to stamp Sally down and win the day by force.

‘I did,’ he replied. ‘You ain’t fit to take charge of those girls; nobody is fit, except Mrs. Spring. And they are going to be taken off your hands, and this house too, and Mrs. Spring will manage them from this day!’

‘Will she?’ Sally asked, with a sudden quietude, which Daniel understood to signify an onset of weakness. ‘Matty!—she!—will she?—indeed!’

‘Yes,’ replied Daniel, growing milder for policy’s sake now that his point was about to be gained. ‘It is kindly meant to you, Sally. You ought to be in your bed. It

is all kindly meant. We must do our duty by everybody, and of course you cannot attend to those young girls. Now, you go home and go to bed, Sally, and cover up warm, and take something hot. It's as much as your life's worth is this walk, you know.'

'Will you listen to me?' cried Sally, with a feeble fierceness that was dreadful to see. 'I have made arrangements for the children. I have provided a protector for them.'

'The protector is Jerome's business,' remarked Daniel, growing angry again. 'Jerome can provide protectors for himself.'

'Hold your tongue!' retorted Sally, fiercely. 'Uncle,' she said, turning to Jerome Dawe, 'I have asked Margaret, and she is going to take charge of the house and the children for the present.'

Daniel leaped with surprise. Till now he had not observed Margaret Alexander, but, looking round, he saw her calm face and composed attitude, and he knew that all was lost. Sally had chosen her ally well. Margaret Alexander was at this moment irresistible. Jerome neither could nor would refuse the proposed arrangement. Crafty Daniel was utterly and hopelessly beaten, and he knew it; and, with a murderous malice in his heart, he stood biting his nails and trying to cover his rage and disappointment. And supple Martha Spring, knowing how matters would turn, resolved to extricate herself from the complication.

‘It’s very kind of you, ma’am,’ she said, fawning upon Mrs. Alexander; ‘I am sure the young ladies will like it.’

This was the finishing stroke for Daniel Ruddock. He realised with renewed rage

that his mean confederate was leaving him to bear alone the disgrace and the vexation of the position.

‘What do you say, Jerome?’ asked Sally, now in a breaking voice. ‘You have confidence in Margaret, have you not?’

‘Perfect confidence! perfect confidence!’ replied that great man. ‘Nothing can be better. I am satisfied, Matty is satisfied, and—and—and Daniel is satisfied!’

‘In that case,’ Sally Badger said, with a last effort, ‘we had better get home. This has been too much for me. You can all—you can—all—go.’

And at this word Sally Badger sank down swooning in the centre of the floor.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH IS DESCRIBED A MOST EXTRAORDINARY
MEETING OF PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN IN THE
STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

It was three o'clock one dull afternoon, and a young gentleman was walking down the Strand. Many other gentlemen, old and young, were doing the same, but our eyes follow this one in particular.

He was of small stature, and the word diminutive would well describe him; for not only was his height stunted, but his feet were small, his hands almost woman-sized, and his features curiously minute. We often see men of short stature, who, by breadth of shoulder, strength of limb, or

bigness of head, make up for deficiency of height; but this young fellow was, throughout, a miniature. His face was finical, not to be impressed with any vigorous emotion. You could fancy the lad dancing prettily, or perhaps writing poetry, or composing songs; but the greater activities, the more forcible deeds of mankind, were not for his handling.

Gracefully enough he made his way through the crowd, with an occasional bow of apology as he jostled a passer-by, or was jostled himself. He was dressed with much care, and, though his steps were bent eastward, his dress and tie and gloves were of the fashion of the West-end. There was nothing of the city about this fine young man.

While he thus pursued his way eastward, another young fellow was coming westward, on the same side of the street. He was a

striking contrast to our beau. Moderately tall, of broad strong build, and with a manly step, so he walked along. It was a good face, too, one would say, with latent humour in it, kindliness, and candour; but the marks of dissipation were plainer than anything else. Besides, the young man's dress was shabby and disordered, as if he had put it on hastily; his hat was dusty and unbrushed, he carried a rough stick in his hand; and altogether his appearance was disreputable. With a look of recklessness and uneasiness oddly mingled, and with eyes cast upon the ground, this youth made his way along, and whomsoever he jostled or whoever jostled him, he held his way straightforward, and noticed nothing.

In a few seconds our trim little beau, whose eyes were all about him, spied this other advancing towards him; and the beau, by one or two expressive movements, made

it quite plain that he wished to escape notice. He glanced across the street to measure the possibilities of flight; but a great van was passing and the way was muddy, and, casting a fond look at his nether attire, he decided that this movement could not be effected. Next, he hoped to pass boldly by unseen, and this he had nearly done when our shabby figure raised his eyes and exclaimed,

‘Eugene!’

And Eugene Ruddock, with obvious discomfort, replied,

‘How are you, Sholto?’

In spite of Sholto’s shabby and dissipated look, there was in his greeting a taking frankness. He was glad to see an old friend; glad, with that ready pleasure which shows a warm and companionable nature. It never struck Sholto that he was such a disreputable figure. These honest hearty

folks never do understand when they are not wanted. Spruce Eugene could not refrain from considering his friends' discreditable exterior, and he did so with such unconscious openness that had Sholto been observing and sensitive, he must have felt affronted. But Sholto, being glad to see his old friend, did not reflect that his old friend might be sorry to encounter him.

The two young men talked together for a few minutes, during which the momentary gleam that had lighted up Sholto's face died out and he resumed his preoccupied and distressed expression. Then, pointing to a tavern close at hand, he asked Eugene to step in and have a glass of beer.

'I never drink beer,' Eugene replied, with superfine scorn.

'Well, we might sit down and have a chat,' said Sholto, with a heavy sigh. 'I

am worn and weary. Nobody will be there at this time of day.'

'I think I must be walking on,' Eugene replied, hoping to shake off his friend.

'If you are walking on,' remarked Sholto, not seeing the other's drift, 'I will walk with you.'

'Oh, never mind,' replied Eugene, dreading the tavern less than the promenade. 'I can wait a bit; let us turn in here. You can have your glass of beer.'

So in they went, and down the narrow sawdusted passage which led the way to what was called the private entrance, as distinguished from the 'bottle and jug' department, at sight of which Eugene shuddered. Sholto trod the sawdust like one used to it, but Eugene went delicately, consoling himself with the thought that they were going to a retired part of the establishment.

To his dismay, when the 'private' glass door was thrust aside, instead of either solitude or respectable company, he beheld an unmistakable cabdriver drinking with a young man whose professional or social position was not discernible by the eye, but who was clad in a summer suit very old and very soiled, a greasy black hat, and a red necktie. This young personage, having seated himself on the counter, gave all who entered a full opportunity of seeing his trousers, shoes, and stockings, which were all very flashy, very worn, and very dirty.

'Have you such a thing as a penny smoke, miss?' asked the young man, who had something of a provincial address.

'Not I,' the young lady answered. 'Here are some twopenny cigars.'

'Good quality, miss?' asked the young man, doubtfully.

‘They are talked up wonderful,’ the young lady replied.

‘What I says is this,’ the cabman remarked, now taking up an interrupted conversation. ‘The party that puts victuals into my stomach is the party for me.

“Empty stomach, empty purse,
May be better, can’t be worse.”

And the speaker drained his glass with the air of a man who had made a display of argument and literature.

‘Is this a private room?’ Eugene asked, in a disgusted whisper.

Sholto, colouring a little, whispered back in his friend’s ear,

‘Rather a rough sort of place; but we medicals are not particular, and cannot be. They give you a roll and a glass of beer here, and I often make that my lunch, you know. What will you take?’

‘Nothing, thank you,’ Eugene answered,

fastidiously, moving as far from the young man on the counter as possible, while the young man regarded him with a stare. 'Don't let me hinder you.'

So Sholto called for a glass of beer; and as the cabdriver and his friend now left the place, and the young lady retired to her seat, the two friends were free to converse.

'I have a world of news to tell you, Eugene,' Sholto said: 'I am so glad we have met. Come and sit down here.'

'I will not sit down, thank you,' Eugene answered, with another shudder. 'I can listen while I stand.'

They retired to a corner. Eugene held his natty cane to his mouth, and kept his chin in the air, trying by his posture to proclaim to anyone who might enter that he was there out of his element, a stranger and a superior. Sholto, who was full of

eagerness to unburden his mind to his friend, did not notice these symptoms, but began to speak.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH FOLLY, VICE, SORROW, DEATH, AND
REPENTANCE ARE BRIEFLY SEEN.

‘EUGENE,’ Sholto began, ‘I am unhappy—oh, very unhappy!’

‘Are you?’ replied Eugene, sucking his stick. ‘Sorry for that.’

‘I have been living a bad life,’ the other continued, with a sort of frank shame about him that was creditable. ‘I have been breaking my old mother’s heart.’

‘Have you?’ replied Eugene, putting his cane to the other side of his mouth for a change. ‘Sorry for that.’

‘You know I have!’ Sholto rejoined.

‘You have heard all about me, have you not?’

‘A good deal, I must say,’ Eugene answered.

‘Well, Eugene,’ Sholto went on, with a trembling voice, ‘I came to myself last night. I am going to do better.’

‘Better, you say?’ replied Eugene, again making a face, as he whisked a trace of sawdust from his coat. ‘Have they a clothes-brush here?’

Sholto appeared not to have heard this remark, for he continued with undiminished earnestness, feeling sure that Eugene must be interested in his story.

‘You remember when mother and I left Middleborough, now ten years ago—more than ten, I believe, I was an idle, good-for-nothing boy then; but I became more anxious to succeed in life after we left. I believe,’ Sholto said, with something like a

blush, 'that a sort of boyish attachment stirred me up. I wanted to rise in life, and marry, and all the rest. I resolved to be a doctor, and my mother favoured the idea, and for several years I worked hard. We met once or twice during that time, you remember. My mother went to live with a sister who was as poor as herself and invalided as well. However, we were happy enough, and I worked on, and do you know, Eugene, for years that silly, childish love-dream was the motive which urged me on! At last I came up here to King's College, and entered the medical school. It was hard work for poor mother to pay for me; but she did it without a murmur—indeed, joyfully. For a time I worked on in London steadily enough; but at last one unlucky day I failed in an examination—failed badly—and I was greatly dispirited. A fellow whom I knew well seeing my de-

pression, advised me to go in for a little gaiety, and unfortunately I took his advice. You know how strictly I had been brought up. I had never seen the inside of a theatre, and of what is called "life" I knew no more than a baby. It was like a burst of enchantment to me, when all at once I plunged into the gaiety of London—at least, into such gaiety as a poor medical student could command. Perhaps had I been earlier made familiar, even slightly, with the scenes on which I now entered, the effect upon me would not have been so great. Being what I was—a raw country lad, with a sharp appetite for life and its pleasures—I was dazzled and overcome. I need not tell you all that followed. I went downhill rather fast, Eugene. You know there is always a wild set among medicals, and the wild set I had hitherto kept clear of. Now I went in for them with a rush. I forgot

everything I had been taught, and everything that I really loved in my heart. For the next few months I was not myself—and, oh, Eugene! when I think now of the life I led, so miserable in its very excitement—miserable even while I was leading it—and so degrading to look back upon, I sometimes feel ready for very shame to go on at it again—anywhere—anyhow—and end as I began!’

‘I should not advise you to do that,’ Eugene remarked, with great composure. ‘It would be foolish.’

‘Upon various pretexts I got money from mother,’ continued Sholto. ‘I squandered it in dissipation—wrote begging for more—described myself as working hard when I was doing nothing, left my fees unpaid, made out lists of expensive books which I wanted, and, having got the money, had another fling until it was spent. That has

been going on for several months, and the reading I have done is next to nothing. Only two days ago mother enclosed me ten pounds, telling me that it was the last she could send me for a long time, as she had actually sold her watch and chain to get it for me. Now think how I must be falling! I had begun betting in a small way, and a few occasional successes had led me to imagine that I might fill my purse by this means, and I resolved to have a try that night. With my mother's money! The price of her watch! Think of it, Eugene! I was just starting from home when a man looked in upon me, who a few months before had been one of our fast fellows. He was kind-hearted, I fancy, but after living a reckless life, he had finished by marrying a penniless girl before he had "passed," and the result was that he never passed at all, and was now living almost in beggary with

a delicate wife and two hungry children. After telling me a pitiful story of his distress (and indeed he looked like death at the moment) he ended by asking if, for the love of God, I could lend him five pounds to prevent his wife and children being turned in to the street. I had the two fives in my pocket, and I wanted a good margin to be able to stand against temporary loss until luck turned; but somehow I could not resist his hollow voice and death-like face. I gave him one bank-note and kept the other for myself; and he went to his family and I to my companions.'

Sholto paused for a few minutes. Then, bending his head a little towards Eugene, he said,

'At half-past three this morning I found myself opposite this very house—half drunk, and yet growing sober by the very pressure of shame and misery—with just one

shilling in my pocket, and not a farthing in the world besides. I had passed the worst night I had ever known—the wildest—the most wretched to look back upon.’

Sholto’s head fell on his breast, and Eugene regarded him with pity, interest, and aversion all in one look.

‘Do you know, Eugene, my first thought was Westminster Bridge! I even took my mother’s letter out of my pocket and tore it up, so that I might not be identified. I wandered wildly along, making, as I supposed, for the river, until I was in one of the low streets of Pimlico. Then I was somewhat aroused from my stupor by noticing that I was passing the house where my friend lived—a miserable place, where they were crowded together, children and all, in two wretched parlours. A light burned in the window, and a woman was

hurrying in at the door as I passed. I cannot tell why, but I followed her into the house, and she, turning round, recognised me by a candle which burned in the hall.

“Go in,” she said, in a low voice; “go in at once.”

‘I went into the parlour. By the dim light that streamed in from the bed-room I could see two children huddled upon the sofa and sleeping. Looking into the bed-room itself, this is what I saw. My friend lying in his bed at his last gasp, and his poor wife beside him holding his hand and wiping his forehead, while the tears ran down her cheeks—tears which he would never notice more. He had caused her to shed many. I suppose she thought I was the doctor, for whom she had just sent, for she motioned me with her hand to make no noise, in the way people do when they mean

that the last moment of the dying must not be disturbed.

‘I walked to the other side of the bed. The brandy was still in my head. My steps and sight were uncertain, and my reason was only half my own. But even to my blunted faculties the contrast was awful. The white face, with the last flicker of life upon it; the thin woman holding back her tears for love of the man who had squandered away her happiness as well as his own; the miserable room; and then, what was still in my brain and printed on my sight, the laughter and the oaths, the glare of the rooms I had lately been in, the faces, the wild carouse; oh, it was such a contrast as might make a hell, and the imaginary scene was to me as vivid as the real one before my eyes.

“Hush!” the woman said, in a low, piercing whisper. “Be still!” she held up her

finger. Then I saw her clasp his hand tighter and bend down over him; she knew that he was gone and with a cry, "*Oh, Edward, my Edward!*" she cast herself on his vacant breast, just as if he had been the guide and the joy of her life, and had departed in honour and peace.

'I comforted her as I best could; and I left the house in a state of feeling such as I could not have believed possible had I not experienced it. But amidst all there was one ray of comfort. I had not refused my friend his last miserable request; he had not died through my selfishness; and remembering this I got my first touch of relief, and as I walked the lonely street I cried like a child.

'I think now those tears saved me from madness or from suicide. I managed to get back to my lodging, where as I arrived the servant was opening the house. I

rushed to my room and cast myself on the sofa, where I must have lain two hours, not asleep, but like one stunned, or suffering from brain-concussion.

‘As I came to myself somewhat, I saw lying on the table before me a letter from my mother. I must have been still under the influence of drink, for I looked at the envelope for a long time, wishing to know what it contained, and yet never stretching out my hand for it. At last I opened it. The letter was occupied with a few gentle remonstrances concerning my extravagance, and ten times as many words of trust and tenderness. These touched me even then, but not most deeply. The letter enclosed a photograph which mother (it must have been for reasons of her own) had procured for me; and if she judged that the sight of it would move me she judged rightly. Only

she could not have known that I should see it at this dreadful hour.

‘Eugene,’ said Sholto, bending towards his friend again, ‘all these years I have been in love with a girl—I have not seen her more than twice in five years—I don’t suppose there is the least chance that I shall ever know her, much less marry her. She is a wealthy girl, a prize for a peer, out of my reach in many ways.’

(Sholto did not observe an ironical smile playing upon his friend’s lip.)

‘But I love her. She is the image of goodness and truth to me; and when this morning I took that photograph in my hand, and looked at her sweet face full of grace and purity and affection, I think I felt for the first time what vice and shame really are. I hated myself. I felt as if I were shooting down some precipice of guilt and

disgrace, and she standing immoveable above, a figure of celestial purity.

‘I clenched my hands. I loathed myself. For another moment the thought of the river came over me, and an end which would for ever wipe out my shame. But again my eyes fell on the picture.

‘It was like an angel’s face. It seemed to be shaping itself into love and pity. It seemed to say that I had not yet fallen so far but there was still hope and the love of the good for me.

‘A living face could not have been more expressive. An audible voice could not have been more intelligible. I caught the picture up, and kissed it, and for the second time that morning I burst out weeping. When I was a little recovered I saw the photograph all stained and blurred with my tears.

‘But I was forgiven! I had hope and

strength in my heart. I stood up and raised my hands to heaven, and I accepted the forgiveness which God, through His angel, had sent to me. I resolved that I would never again think of the black past, and that life should be wrenched from me before I again allowed vice to have the mastery over me.

‘Penniless, wretched as I was, dark as were my prospects, I felt brave and happy. The new thought within me was greater than any outward circumstances. I felt as if I had conquered life already. It was wonderful the thoughts that ran through me—the ecstasy! the resolution! the fearlessness!

‘And now, Eugene, my better life has begun. I am glad to tell you all this because we have been friends so long; and, besides, it does me good to open my heart to any one. Now you can do me a great kindness.

I am without a sovereign in the world. I dare not write to my mother. Can you—will you—lend me ten pounds to help me until I have made my way a little? I know you can, and will.'

'You may be sure I would if I could,' replied Eugene. 'I have been greatly interested in your story, Sholto. I think you need not have reproached yourself so much; but look here—' Eugene opened his purse carefully, not letting Sholto see its contents. 'Yes, I have one sovereign. That I can lend you. Pay me when you please.'

Sholto, with a downcast face, took the sovereign, thanking his friend, and, before he could speak again, Eugene looked at his watch and exclaimed,

'I am late, Sholto. I must run. Good-bye. Write to me some day——'

And he was off, almost before the other could wish him farewell. So Eugene Rud-

dock, well dressed and refined, went his way. His business was the purchase of a diamond ring, and already he was imagining the effect of it upon his white finger. Sholto, looking depressed and disappointed, stepped out a moment later, and paced his way back to his lodging. Already that sovereign in his pocket was suggesting a return to the haunts of the night before, while Eugene's cool selfishness was raising every rebellious impulse of his nature. There were better thoughts in poor Sholto's breast, too—struggles, wishes, and prayers.

‘What a wreck Sholto is!’ Eugene thought. ‘I wonder these fellows cannot see that vice does not pay.’

And Sholto, pacing along the Strand, and feeling his tempter upon him once more, was grasping at his good resolution like a man who is drowning.

Oh, how many thousand, thousand times,

under various costumes, has the same solemn Comedy been gravely performed since the day when All-seeing Eyes marked 'two men' going up into the Temple to pray!

CHAPTER XXII.

SOCIETY: GOOD, BAD, AND INDIFFERENT.

‘A WAGER of twenty to one, madam! gold against silver; in other words, shillings against sovereigns—twenty sovereigns against twenty shillings, madam! And your obedient servant, sitting here before you was down for the twenty sovereigns, while little Merrythought might win gold but could only lose silver.’

At a large garden-party at Sir John Sanctuary’s, our former acquaintance, Major Sanctuary, in great spirits and full of talk, was enlightening an admiring circle which had gathered round him. There

was a kind of glossy shabbiness about the Major, an appearance of having burnished up old clothes with care for a grand occasion. Otherwise Major Sanctuary looked but little changed—a trifle grayer, a shade more gaunt, but nothing else.

‘Merrythought is only our nickname for him at the club. His real name is Russell,’ he continued, looking round with great animation. ‘A more gambling little dog you could not meet. This is how it came about. Merrythought and I had been sitting on Brighton promenade—King’s Road, you know—watching the people walk and drive up and down. Says he, “I know half the company.” “Merrythought,” I said, “it is impossible at your time of life that you can know as many men as I do.” “Two to your one,” says he. “Merry,” I answered, “I deny it.” “Not the first time a fact has been denied,” he replies. “Tell you

what," said I, "I'll wager you twenty sovereigns to twenty shillings that more acquaintances of mine than of yours pass this seat in the next half-hour." "Done!" cried Merrythought. "What time is it?" I asked. "Eight minutes to one," says he. "Good!" cried I; "we shall go on to twenty-two minutes past." We began, madam. At first I went off well, for who should go by but old Lady Dolly Vernon and her three daughters, maypole girls, but I was pleased to see 'em just then. "How d'ye feel, Merry?" says I, when begad, madam, before the words were out of my mouth, five young bucks walking abreast came up and saluted him! "Ha, ha, Major!" says he. However, at the end of ten minutes I was nine ahead. Good! But next minute I saw a girl's school coming our way—more pairs of skirts than I could count. You will scarcely believe it,

madam, but Merrythought bowed to every girl of 'em, and the girls to him; and the fellow told me he knew every girl of 'em, his second cousin having been at school there. "Merry," said I, "I wish my old regiment was quartered here!" Well, madam, to make a long story short, at seventeen minutes past, Merrythought was seven ahead, and the company getting thin. "Hand over," he calls out. "Wait," I said. Just then I saw a little girl, daughter of a friend, running up to me. "How are you, dear?" I said. "*One more, Merry—* How is your mother?" "Oh, mother is over there," the child answered, "and all of us are with her." "All of you!" I said. "Fanny," I continued, whispering the child, "run and tell mother I have got a touch of the gout, but I want to see her and all the children—mind you say *all* the children—and at once, for I have to leave." Off the

child ran. Up comes the mother pleased at the attention, and all her brood with her, Ladies and gentlemen,' the Major said, now addressing the whole group of listeners, 'you will hardly believe it, but I won by the baby, a child not two months old; and the last of the shillings is in my pocket this moment!'

With a jocose and opulent air the Major rose from his seat and walked with a fine step across the lawn, shaking with laughter over his own story, and the little group that had gathered round him melted away.

As most of our old friends, and some new ones, are in the company, we have here a convenient opportunity of renewing our several acquaintances. And we may mark what ten years have done for our Golden Girls and their anxious friends.

First let us introduce ourselves to Sir

John Sanctuary himself, who stands at the foot of a flight of steps receiving his guests. Sir John was an undersized man, squab, with a red face and one sleeve pinned against his breast. As he welcomed each successive visitor he spoke in a short scolding tone, snapping his words, which were uttered in a very loud key. There was a curious resemblance to the manner of his cousin the Major, with this difference, that while the Major's address had something in it of effort and imitation, the Baronet's was plainly original, unstudied, and the outcome of an eccentric character. But amidst his abruptness he was well-bred, and he managed to make his guests feel at ease, when that might have been least of all expected.

Beside him stood his son, Robert Sanctuary. He was a tall, raw-looking youth, with red hair, freckled complexion, great sunburnt hands, and a loud voice, such as

might have been trained in the fields. There was animal strength about the young fellow, and he had a good-natured aspect; but culture had done nothing for him. Perhaps Esau was something of his type, for young Sanctuary was without doubt endowed with animal qualities both in virtue and in vice. Yet even in him there was some trace of the ease of good society, and like his father he was able, when he chose, to make strangers feel at home.

Close at hand stood two girls, one dressed in dark blue and the other in pale green, the blue girl being attired with great richness, while her companion's dress was far from new. These girls were talking together with the air of bosom-friends, and while the girl in blue seemed to have an eye upon young Robert Sanctuary, he—never glancing at her—would often exchange a word with the girl in green. And

the girl in green always brightened up when Bob Sanctuary spoke to her; and when her face brightened in this way, it was a taking face, lit up by actual good-humour or the resolve to appear pleasant. No wonder that Bob Sanctuary when he looked once looked twice, and when he looked twice looked as many more times as he decently could.

The brightly-dressed girl in blue was Lucy Ruddock, and the poorly-dressed girl in green was Victoria Sanctuary. Victoria the far-sighted Beatrice Ruddock long ago perceived to have been destined by her father the Major as future wife for Eugene. Lucy, her fond mother hoped, would one day be presented at Court as Lady Sanctuary. For ten years have not altered the plans of these plotting parents, and on this very day, and in this very garden, Major Sanctuary and Beatrice Ruddock are hoping

that their separate little schemes will be brought nearer to success.

For though ten years turns boys and girls into men and women, it is surprising how lightly such a period deals with those who are men and women already. Beatrice Ruddock at forty-five is changed from what she was at thirty-five ; but the change is not very marked. She is still a handsome woman. Daniel, who is at her side, somewhat afraid of the fine company, is only a little more round-shouldered, and a shade more cunning in the face. And Jerome Dawe, who is here also, has accomplished the journey from eight-and-fifty to eight-and-sixty with small outward signs of wear and tear. Jerome's legs still do their work well ; his portly trunk and large head are still erect. A few specks of snuff lie on the frill of his shirt, just as when we saw him last. Even the ebony stick Shakespeare has

suffered no more serious change than the loss of a little colour on the crown of the head—growing bald, like the original. For anything appearances tell, Jerome Dawe might have been an eighth sleeper these ten years, and the spell might this moment have been broken.

Now over all the gay company a flutter passes. Every eye turns towards the flight of steps, where four visitors have all at once appeared. First comes a tall young lady with light, strong step, and eyes that somehow fix you before you mark any other feature: clear, brave eyes, nobly set, which look as if they could equally express truth, courage, or anger, but never a base emotion.

‘How do you do, Miss Walsingham?’ Sir John says. ‘Very pleasant to see you. You are a stranger in my house.’

For Mildred Walsingham is a Golden Girl, and even the blunt baronet, who is

one thing to all men, grows deferential as he salutes the great heiress.

‘Where is your sister?’ he asked, looking round.

‘Violet must not walk, Sir John,’ Mildred answered, with a touch of sadness in her manner. ‘She has gone round in her chair, and will be here presently.’

Behind Mildred came our old friends the Badger family. Sally, happily recovered from her fever, for the past ten years had fought the battle of life, which was still raging sore around her. Sally’s hair had grown grey, and her features were more marked; but her carriage was as vigorous and as emblematic of a warlike character as ever; while her dress, though somewhat improved from former days, still showed signs of poverty. Samuel Badger had scarcely changed a hair or a feature; but Hector was grown a young man, ill-dressed, awk-

ward, and plainly not at ease in prospect of the fine company.

‘Sammy, Sammy!’ Mrs. Badger whispered, before they reached the Baronet, ‘you have sat on the tail of your coat! It is so dreadfully creased. How *could* you do it?’

‘My love,’ Samuel Badger replied, trying to twist his head over his left shoulder. ‘I don’t see any crease.’

‘You are looking over the wrong shoulder, Sammy,’ retorted his wife. ‘There is a crease that might have been made with a mangle.’

‘That’s the worst of a tail,’ remarked poor Samuel Badger, in semi-soliloquy. ‘Do what you will, your tail always gets on the chair before yourself. I declare, Sally, I will begin to wear cutaway coats!’

‘Not while I am spared,’ rejoined Mrs. Badger. ‘Hector!’—she spoke in the same

fierce sort of whisper—‘do hold up your head. And in the name of gracious goodness, Hector, what have you got in your pocket? You stick out like a carpet-bag!’

‘Only a book, mother,’ Hector replied, looking thoroughly miserable.

‘Only a book! What do you want with books now?’ his mother answered. ‘By the look of your coat I should think it must be a family Bible.’

‘No such thing, mother,’ retorted Hector, resenting this sarcasm. ‘It is only a volume of Johnson’s *Dictionary*.’

‘A volume of Johnson’s *Dictionary*!’ his mother repeated, raising her eyes, as if appealing to some superior being for sympathy. Then she addressed her son with scathing irony, ‘I suppose you are going to question the company, Hector, to see how they spell?’

‘I only wanted to look into it, mother, for one or two things, if I had a spare moment.’

‘I do think,’ Sally Badger exclaimed, ‘Providence ought to help me. It is out of all reason. Husband and son! Never was a woman so distracted!’

Happily for all parties they had now advanced to where the baronet was standing, and salutations had to be performed. Through this part of the ceremony Sally went with considerable dignity; but when her husband, responding to Sir John Sanctuary’s welcome, said, ‘How do you do, Sir John? Allow me to congratulate you upon your pelargoniums,’ Sally managed to pull him away forcibly, but with such adroitness as not to attract attention.

‘They are not pelargoniums at all, Sammy.’

‘My love, I thought they were.’

Meanwhile Hector, in a state of nervous confusion which almost amounted to the abolition of reason, made his obeisance ; but while executing his part of the performance, the unhappy young man trod upon the baronet's toe. Sir John Sanctuary manifested so much anguish and Hector was so horrified that, to avoid a repetition of the mishap, he made a wild circular leap away from his host. The rapidity of his movements brought the pocket with the dictionary flying out from his person in a kind of outer circle ; and the volume struck Sir John smartly in the ribs, disturbing his bodily equilibrium, and leaving him in momentary doubt whether or not he was the victim of an assault.

Sally saw all in a kind of controlled delirium.

‘ Now will you both,’ she said, following her husband and her son, and addressing

them with the composure of one who masters strong emotion—‘*will* you both go somewhere, and keep quiet till I come to you? Any corner will do.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH OUR GOLDEN GIRL IS SURROUNDED BY
LOVERS AND WORSHIPPERS.

EVERYBODY for ten miles round was at Sir John Sanctuary's garden-party. It was a gay scene enough. Two or three croquet sets and one or two games of Badminton were going on; and there was also a band which enlivened the air with music, not of very fine quality, but still the sound was agreeable. Amidst all the flutter of the well-dressed crowd, however, and their various amusements, one peculiar circumstance was to be noticed. There was a constant tendency among the visitors to gather

into small knots, these knots being clustered at a civil but interested distance round one central group, which, by the going and coming of different people, maintained its size undiminished. So we have seen a princess making a circuit of a picture-gallery with her attendants, and behind these a following of the curious, who may talk to each other, but their eyes and attention are upon the princess. In our central group there was no princess, but what in Middleborough formed an excellent substitute—a Golden Girl.

Mildred Walsingham was charmingly dressed. Her gown was white, with maize trimmings, and she wore the most coquettish little straw hat that ever was seen, flat in the crown, with two broad white streamers, understood to be strings. It was one of those costumes that look sweetly simple and even inexpensive, but the practised

female eye would have recognised it at once as a costly bit of simplicity. In fact, it was the dress of the day; all the women said so, and, being conspicuous, it enabled admirers to find Mildred wherever she might be. The girl looked very handsome, and when the young men, mindful of her incalculable fortune, marked her queenly figure and her patrician face, oh, believe me, many hearts beat high at the sight of her. And many young fellows pictured themselves seated beside Mildred, with flying steeds of glossy coat in front and clouds of dust behind. Carriage and horses paid for with *her* money. The world all before the bridegroom and the bride. The world paved with the gold of the Golden Girl! And were these young fellows wrong? I hope not.

Why, this novel of 'Golden Girls' was written to teach young gentlemen to catch

heiresses ; and some day it shall be followed by another didactic history, called *Golden Boys* ; and when these two works are complete, every lad in England will be able to hook a rich wife ; and every lass will be able, by lifting her little white hand, to secure a carriage fortune. So, young ladies and gentlemen, do not waste your time over merely amusing novels like those of Mr. Payn or Mr. Black, which only make you forget yourselves. Study me, a dull, plodding penman, who work my way to a useful end, like a mule on a country road.

These young gentlemen just described, on the principle of ‘ Nothing venture, nothing have,’ addressed Mildred Walsingham as often and as winningly as possible. She did not repel these advances, but a smile played over her lip at times when her young admirers were most pressing. A young

admirer, quick to draw conclusions, might not have been encouraged by the smile. There was a tincture of cynicism in it. Mildred was too shrewd for the flatteries poured upon her. A simpleton might have thought herself beauty's queen; but observing Mildred noticed that a neighbour's governess, the orphan of a clergyman, a girl of great loveliness, was left alone all that afternoon. The young men followed Mildred.

Mildred said to herself,

'It is not my looks, for I am not so pretty; nor my manner, for I am not so engaging. Aha! it is my money these lads love.'

In short, had any young fellow flirted with the governess, and devoted himself to her, he would have been the man who that day would have made the most effectual inroad upon the affection of Mildred Wal-

singham. No young fellow knew that secret. Every young fellow fluttered like a moth about the Golden Girl.

By-and-by Mildred sauntered across the lawn to where her sister's invalid chair was drawn up, close beside the band. All signs of cynicism vanished as she came beside her sister and took the thin hand caressingly.

‘Little one’—she often called Violet so—
‘are you enjoying yourself?’

Violet Walsingham was a young woman now, and inexpressibly lovely. There was a depth of expression in her eyes, which were a kind of porcelain blue, deep, still, and exquisitely clear. She had a wealth of dark hair, wonderfully long eyelashes, and her lips could run into the archest smile. But she still looked frail and ready to vanish; and there was a sadness in her face which that arch smile relieved only as one

ray breaking through a rent in the cloud relieves a sunless sky.

‘Little one, are you enjoying yourself?’

It is a beam of sunshine indeed that comes across her face; it is a celestial light that passes into the deep eyes. It is a smile of heavenly sweetness that plays upon her lips. Mildred is all in all to the sick girl. She does not tell Mildred so, lest she should weary her, but there is no brightness for Violet when Mildred is away. She has been following the white gown all over the lawn, watching its every turn, delighted if Mildred seems happy, but always with a kind of hope, not expressed to herself, that Mildred will not forget her, as she lies there alone. And Mildred does not forget, and her cold, icy expression melts the moment she meets her sister’s eyes, and the two take hands with a natural tenderness which is pleasant to see.

‘It is such fun here,’ cries Violet. ‘I have been watching that old gentleman; he gets so angry if they croquet his ball, and that girl in pink seems to delight in teasing him. There she goes again! Oh, do look at him!’

How quickly the plaintive face lights up with fun! how pleasantly her voice tinkles with merriment! Mildred catches the infection and laughs too, but there is a sound of pure fun in Violet’s laugh which Mildred cannot reach. And now the knots of people begin to melt into one; a circle forms around the Golden Girls; actually there stand in it Hector Badger, Bob Sanctuary, and Eugene Ruddock. In its outer ring are Major Sanctuary, Sir John, Beatrice, and the fearless Sally Badger. Now, for this little bit of sport—plot and counterplot, attack and defence—I must and will have a fresh chapter. Just as in a well-arranged

comedy each set of actors come to the front in turn, and have the stage to themselves, so we shall give a separate space to fathers, mothers, lovers, and Golden Girls, playing their successive parts.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH ELDERLY LOVERS OF THE WORLD ARE
SEEN DOING THEIR KIND.

THE elders first.

‘Dear Sir John,’ Beatrice Ruddock said, in her blindest voice, ‘I wish above all things to see your paintings. I am positively dying for a sight of them.’

‘I am no painter,’ the Baronet replied, ‘—not by education. I love the art, but I was never taught how to hold a brush or mix a colour. Still I have a few daubs, and my friends are good enough to be pleased with them.’

‘And your son, Sir John ; he is an artist, is he not ?’

Clever Beatrice knows well that the dream of Sir John’s life is that his son shall be a great painter, and she knows, too, that Bob Sanctuary is as likely to turn out a painter as a colt is likely to play the fiddle. But Mrs. Ruddock takes good care never to hint that the fond father, who hopes that time and study may develop genius in the lad’s breast, is nursing a delusion. Mrs. Ruddock has a meaning in everything she says and does. So she asks if Bob Sanctuary be not an artist, and waits for the answer in sweet simplicity.

‘In time I hope he will paint,’ Sir John answered. ‘I am going to take him the round of the Continental galleries, and to try to develop his taste.’

‘How delightful!’ murmured Beatrice ;

‘Munich, Dresden, Milan, Rome. Oh, it is quite a Paradise of an idea !’

‘Hope we shall enjoy it,’ the Baronet said, bluntly. ‘Hope it will turn out well.’

‘Do you know, Sir John,’ Beatrice continued, sweetly, ‘my daughter Lucy is just beginning to show the prettiest and the most interesting fancy for art. I want to give her a little training too ; but my lazy husband will not leave home, and so Lucy and I must make our little tour as best we can. We might meet, Sir John, somewhere ; and while the two young people sauntered round the galleries, why, Sir John, you and I—sober, old-fashioned people—might sit together and entertain each other with our neighbours’ failings and our own virtues. Might we not?’

Which little question Beatrice put laughingly and insinuatingly.

‘Upon my word,’ the Baronet cried, looking with animation into the lady’s handsome face, ‘I consider it a capital thought. Stay,’ he added, humorously, ‘I wanted to study a little myself. I am afraid, under the circumstances you propose, I should forget the pictures altogether!’

The Baronet made a bow very gallant and facetious, and Beatrice responded with just the little laugh and hint of a blush that befitted the occasion. And Sir John Sanctuary thought at the moment that perhaps in such society his son’s dormant love of art might be quickened. Had Sir John been a woman he would have seen matrimony in Beatrice’s dulcet phrases, as plainly as a marksman sees his target. But Sir John belonged to the sex that is not always on the look-out for love and marriage, and which accordingly is sometimes gently and delicately fooled into a trap with eyes wide

open. Oh, winsome, specious Beatrice Ruddock! Oh, rare novel mine of *Golden Girls*, which shall teach all the world how to marry or not marry, but wisely either way!

While this ingenious dialogue went on, Major Sanctuary made his way to the side of Eugene.

‘How d’ye do, my boy?’ he said, laying his hand on the young man’s shoulder. ‘Done with Oxford yet?’

‘Not yet—not for eighteen months,’ answered Eugene, who was adjusting his necktie and working his chin about in his finical way.

‘And when you have done, what then, my boy? Church? State? Army? Navy? Physic? Law? In a word, sir,’ the Major called out, as if irritated at the number of alternatives he had run up, ‘what are you going to be?’

‘Never thought about it,’ replied Eugene, with a languid and superfine air. ‘Nevaw,’ was his reply, phonetically. ‘Scarcely know—you know.’ He looked approvingly at the toe of his faultless boot.

‘Tell you what, sir,’ the Major cried, ‘you ought to live in town, sir. Get in among people of fashion, sir. With your air and your habits—confound it, sir!’ the Major said, with an air of exasperation, ‘you *ought* to be among people of fashion! I could introduce you to dozens of men in my set; spirited, well-behaved men! It is an expensive set, mine; money flies like—’ Here the Major nervously twitched a frayed shirt-cuff out of sight, and, not finding the simile for which he sought, wound up in this way: ‘They are spirited, well-behaved men, sir, and you ought to be among them.’

Eugene not entering into this dashing proposal, a pause followed, which enabled

the Major to remember something all at once.

‘I quite forgot! With this lively conversation, I *quite* forget! My daughter—Victoria—asked me to coax you to be her partner in a croquet set. I said, “No, make your sets for yourselves,” said I. But here she comes, and she will never forgive me if I have not secured you.’

As a matter of fact, Miss Sanctuary was standing perfectly still, with her back full upon Eugene, and she and her cousin Bob were talking together in an interested way, so that the Major was forced to call out,

‘Victoria! Victoria! Mr. Ruddock is waiting for you.’

‘Papa,’ the girl whispered to him, reproachfully, ‘I don’t want to play with Mr. Ruddock. Bob and I were going to look at the horses. It *is* provoking!’

The Major did not say,

‘Victoria, your cousin Robert will be a poor baronet one day, and there could be no greater madness than for you and him to fall in love. Eugene Ruddock will be a man of fortune, and just the husband for you. Therefore I, your anxious parent, am trying to disentangle you from your cousin, and to entangle you with my excellent young friend.’

The Major did not say this—in fact, the Major did not say anything at all, for a spy was watching them, and at this point an adroit and fearless player entered into the little matrimonial game.

‘Eugene,’ Mrs. Ruddock said, laying her hand on her boy’s shoulder, ‘I think Miss Walsingham rather wants to make up a set for Badminton. Go and ask if you can be of use to her.’

Off Eugene darted, well pleased to escape from the Major’s rather too artful snare.

Off went Victoria and Bob, laughing and manifesting a tendency to lay their heads side by side; and they disappeared round a little plantation and were gone.

The Major looked very blank.

‘This woman can turn one’s little plans topsy-turvy when she pleases,’ he said to himself. The wonder is he did not say it aloud, for in his vexation he struck the grass with his cane.

But adroit and fearless Beatrice Ruddock, vigilant still, was not going to vex the Major more than was absolutely necessary, not she.

‘You see, Major,’ she said, continuing her speech with the lightest and most unembarrassed of laughs, ‘if we old people did not look after these boys and girls they would never speak to each other, but would draw up in opposite lines, finger in mouth, like

at a school-treat before the cake comes in!’

‘Well now,’ the Major said to himself, ‘this is uncommon effrontery. This is a very impudent woman.’

But he was no match for Beatrice. Looking straight into his disturbed face, with the blindest unconsciousness that anything could possibly have happened to vex him, and with the most artless assumption that he was in a sportive mood, she put her arm through his and rambled laughingly on,

‘It was not *our* way, Major, when we were boys and girls long ago. We did not need much prompting, did we?’

The Major looked at her—indignant still. But her complete innocence, his own gallantry, and besides a natural humour of good-fellowship which he could never quite overcome, all fought for her.

‘You are right, ma’am,’ he cried, with his usual gaiety. ‘We had ten times the life of these young sparks in our day.’

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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